

HISTORY OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE
OF SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

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OF PROVIDENCE OF SAINT MARY.

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**THE HISTORY OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE
OF SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS**

THE HISTORY OF
THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE
OF
SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

In Two Volumes

VOLUME I

1806 - 1856

by

SISTER MARY BORROMEO BROWN, Ph.D.

With an Introduction by

MOST REVEREND PAUL C. SCHULTE, D.D.

Archbishop of Indianapolis



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SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE OF SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS, INDIANA

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DEDICATION

TO OUR LADY OF PROVIDENCE
AND HER CHILDREN
THE DAUGHTERS OF MOTHER THEODORE
AND THEIR STUDENTS AND PUPILS
EVERYWHERE

PREFACE

THE work of the Sisters of Providence in the Indiana woodland forms part of several diverse movements in the world of their day, first in Europe in the great resurgence of Catholic thought and activity in post-Revolutionary France and also in the far-flung missionary labors of France across the globe. In America the Sisters fitted as an integral part into the great western pioneer movement of settlement, development, and education; and their labors tied up intimately in particular with the diocese of Vincennes, which was only six years old when they reached Indiana. They bore their part also in the great work of assimilating and educating the new immigrant population, so largely Catholic, and exerted a powerful influence in commending the much-maligned Catholic religion to their Protestant pupils and their parents. When the little group of frightened Frenchwomen crossed the Wabash on that memorable afternoon in late October, 1840, to undertake their works of zeal and education in the thick Vigo County woods, they brought to Indiana a permanent and beneficent force destined to grow and wax more and more potent for good in many diverse fields.

This study owes its inception to the desire of Reverend Mother Mary Bernard, late Superior General of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, to preserve the early traditions of the Congregation before the present generation of those who knew the eyewitnesses of the foundation years has disappeared. The writer remembers as a school girl three aged religious, the last of the Foundresses: one an infirm little Sister, Sister Agnes, known as the "first postulant," seemingly the eldest of the group; another, bent and toilworn but still actively employed in the sewing work of the convent lingerie, Sister Mary Xavier, always called Sister Mary; and still a third, Sister Olympiade, a sociable old Sister without any fixed employment, a colorful and interesting personality.

Before 1900 these Sisters and many others, among them Sister Mary Joseph Le Fer, Sister St. Urbain, and Mother Mary Cecilia, had all gone to their reward. The only links with the foundation years were then those Sisters who had entered the novitiate in Mother Theodore's time, many of whom, however, were still alive. Of these Mother Anastasie was the most important because of her long and intimate association with the Foundress. Sister Mary Theodore, Sister Mary Ursula, and Sister Mary Ambrose also belong in this group, but the last of these Sisters passed away when Sister Irenée died in 1925. When Sister Irma, who had known Mother Theodore as a child, died in 1944 the last tangible tie was broken. All these Sisters many of us, however, knew, and their reminiscences have colored the pages of this record.

The Life and Life-Work of Mother Theodore Guérin (1904), the two editions of the *Life of Sister St. Francis Xavier* (1882, 1934), and the *Journals and Letters of Mother Theodore Guérin* (1936), cover the same ground, the first sixteen years in Indiana, but the monumental 1937 collection of fresh original letters from France and data derived from the Notre Dame University and other archives have thrown much light upon the early years and made possible the present volume.

A debt of appreciation remains to be paid to the many who have contributed of their thought and time and labor to the publication of this history. To the Most Reverend Paul C. Schulte, Archbishop of Indianapolis, the author acknowledges a great debt for his kind encouragement. His own earlier labors in the field of American Church history made his opinions doubly valuable. To the Reverend Robert Gorman of the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College faculty is due a special meed of appreciation for generously given practical and scholarly criticism of the text, and to Reverend Thomas T. McAvoy, C.S.C., for the use of the valuable facilities of the Notre Dame University Archives; to Very Reverend Paul Deery for access to the Vincennes Cathedral Archives, and to Very Reverend Albert C. Wicke for the gift of a fine collection of special documents. Brother Bernard, C.S.C., Mrs. Leo Schultheis of Vincennes, and Miss Florence Crawford, librarian of the Emeline Fairbanks Memorial Library in Terre Haute, have all rendered valuable assistance.

In her own Community, the number of those who have contributed in varying degrees is very large. The special readers of the manuscript appointed by Mother Mary Bernard were Sister Eugenia, dean of the college, Sister Gertrude, and Sister Mary Joseph, all of whom gave liberally of their time and thought and Sister Eugenia and Sister Mary Joseph assisted with the proofs. Sister Marie Angèle of the college English faculty assisted by Sister Catherine Therese made the index, and Sister Camilla, librarian of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, offered great help on many occasions. Sister Eugenia's generous assistance in particular, however, was of the highest value at every step along the way toward publication.

The author offers as a tribute of affection and regard to Mother Mary Bernard, who gave so generously the time for the study, and to all the Sisters of Providence, her effort to bring to life again for another generation the blessed years of their heroic Foundress's life span, its seven long years of sorrow, "*les années de nos épreuves*," as she always called them, and its final hallowed years of peace, in the hope that the love and reverence for their incomparable Mother, which she learned years ago from Mother Anastasie, may find an echo in their hearts.

S. M.B.

INTRODUCTION

IN TELLING the story of the early development of the Catholic Church in America too little space is often given to the part played by our pioneer Sisterhoods. It is true they were not the trail-blazers, and their entrance into the picture as a rule was not so romantic as that of the pioneer missionary, who, with his Mass-kit in his saddle-bags or more frequently strapped to his own back, made his way over trackless prairies or through primeval forests to bring the consolations of our Holy Religion to the outposts of civilization. Yet so closely after the first missionary came the silent unobtrusive handmaids of Christ to conduct schools and instruct the children that they often found prepared no adequate home to shelter them nor means for their support. Bearing their privations and hardships with heroic fortitude, these noble women with their lives dedicated to God stepped in and often supplied the aid and instruction that meant the difference between the success and failure of the efforts of the pioneer bishop or priest.

With the rapid development and colonization of the Middle West during the earlier decades of the past century came the foundation of many new dioceses to facilitate the care of the numerous Catholics to be found among the first settlers. Almost to a pattern would be the erection of the new see, then the consecration of the first bishop, who would hastily survey his needs and rush off to Europe to beg for the personnel and the material aid necessary to carry on the works of religion and charity in his new diocese. A Sisterhood to take over the instruction of the children in the budding parishes and to conduct projected institutions of charity was almost always included in the quest.

It was in answer to just such an appeal that the Sisters of Providence found their way to Indiana more than a century ago. The story of their coming and early years on the banks of the Wabash is a story of privations and hardships heightened by misunderstandings and misgivings. The selection of the wilderness of western Vigo County by Bishop Hailandière as a home for the new community, as well as many of the Bishop's later decisions and directives are as much of an enigma to us today as to Mother Theodore and her companions one hundred years ago. That Providence played a part in the matter, however, is evident from the blessings with which God has crowned the patient suffering and efforts of these humble French Sisters and their successors. We doubt that had the Sisters of Providence been rooted elsewhere they would have flourished more.

The good that they have accomplished during their one hundred and more years of labor in America can only be told by God's recording angel, but today a community of some thirteen hundred Sisters and tens of thousands of men and women, the better for having been educated by them, are living witnesses of their faithfulness to their vows and God-given vocation, while as monuments to their industry, thrift, and sacrifice stand a score or more of educational institutions the gem of which and the heart of the community is the world-renowned St. Mary-of-the-Woods now crowning the hilltops of what one hundred years ago seemed such

an unpromising wilderness. As we read of the sufferings and heartaches of the little community so patiently borne during the first decade and a half of its existence as described by Sister Mary Borromeo in the following pages, perhaps we learn why God has been pleased to so bless the labors of Mother Theodore and her Sisters.

PAUL C. SCHULTE
Archbishop of Indianapolis

INDIANAPOLIS
February 7, 1948.

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PROLOGUE

CATHOLIC Brittany, ancient land of faith and courage, is in many respects the cradle-land of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. History and romance were made all down the ages on this rocky French promontory, ringed on three sides by the wild and melancholy Atlantic. One of its snow-white sea gulls winging its flight along the rocky shore passes by Roman towns and strange neolithic remains, the old druid dolmens and cromlechs, medieval châteaux half hidden in the dense forest, and frowning Gothic cathedrals of compelling and beautiful design, multitudes of tiny village churches, old towns filled with timber and stone houses, monasteries founded from Ireland and Wales in a distant past, and lastly enthroned upon its giant rock the great medieval pile of Mont Saint Michel. Pardons, processions of praying fisher folk, wind along the wooded lanes of Brittany; great numbers of tragic wayside Calvaries bless them.

Brittany was the homeland of the Foundresses of the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir. Almost all the early Sisters were Bretons. Those rugged shores were the birthplace of that *grand dame*, daughter of an *émigré* count during the French Revolution, the Foundress Joséphine Zoé Rolland du Roscoät, of her successor as Superior General, Mother Mary, the peasant girl from the Isle of Bréhat, and of the American Foundress, Mother Theodore. Ruillé-sur-Loir, the theatre of their life-work, is not in Brittany. It lies eastward in the old province of Maine, a region more deeply wounded perhaps than any other by the indifference and religious neglect engendered by the Revolution.

Till the fourth century this ancient land of Armorica was druid. The enormous monuments from prehistoric times rising in majesty upon its brown moors tell a half-obliterated story of pagan sacrifices. Driven before the fierce waves of piratical invasion in the fifth and sixth centuries, wave upon wave of Celts braved the tumultuous waters of the outer channel to land in hordes upon the rocks of Gaul. In their wake came the missionary saints to rear upon every promontory the towers of a church or monastery. Irish and English monks settled here and continued the work of conversion among the natives during succeeding centuries. As years swept on, this remote and rocky fastness bred a daring race of sea rovers; in its sturdy peasant stock however and in its ancient nobility faith took strong and deep root and blossomed and bore fruit of heroism.

It is with singular aptness that a Celtic cross rears its graceful lines today near the quiet tomb where, the seventh of the pioneer American group to die, Mother Theodore was laid among the white crosses in the little forest cemetery near Saint Anne's Chapel at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. She was a Celt of Celts. Not only did the Sisters of Providence draw their principal members from the sainted land of Brittany, but the region also bestowed many of its sons upon the Vincennes mission. Bruté, de la Hailandière, his nephews, the two Audrans, and his cousin, Father Louis Ducoudray, the two Guéguens, Corbe and Martin and Du Pontavice, Julien Delaune, early pastor of Madison, and the Eudists of Saint Gabriel's

College, Vabret and Bellier, the two Berels, and Chassé, were all scions of the melancholy and spiritual race, which, accepting the faith in the fourth century, has clung to it ever since with the fortitude of the martyrs. Hardly a region of this ancient land is without its treasured souvenirs for the daughters of Mother Theodore.

Brittany suffered terribly but courageously during the Huguenot wars and the Revolution from the guillotine and the barbarous drownings. Rennes was its ancient capital. Here Bishop Bruté spent his early years and as a little boy during the Reign of Terror went through the harrowing experiences which figure so largely in his memoirs. Here Bishop de la Hailandière was a child, a youth, and a parish priest for years before coming to America in 1836. Here Abbé Augustin Martin was chaplain to the Royal College, and Mother Theodore spent eight years in charge of the schools in the parish of Notre Dame. This parish possesses an ancient church once attached to a Benedictine Abbey with parts dating back to the eleventh century. Combourg, north of Rennes, where Chateaubriand's family château was situated, and where he spent his early childhood, was the retreat for forty years after his retirement of Bishop de la Hailandière, who died there in 1882, his heart still in Indiana and his proudest title, *ancien évêque de Vincennes*.

The old walled and fortified town of Fougères northeast of Rennes, sent three of its daughters to America with Mother Theodore, Sister Saint Liguori, Sister Mary Xavier, and the first martyr of charity, Sister Lawrence. Old brown granite medieval churches among timber or stone houses bent over the pavement add interest to this ancient town once destroyed by Henry II. In the Roman town of Nantes at the mouth of the Loire many French missionaries to America made their studies, and here also before the Revolution the Abbé Jacques-François Dujarié, Founder of the Sisters of Providence, was a cleric. Its Bishop till recent years was Monseigneur Eugène Le Fer de la Motte, a nephew of the early mistresses of novices in America, Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Mary Joseph. The strange and erratic genius of Abelard was cradled in this region, and near here at Vannes the great Dominican preacher and wonder-worker, Saint Vincent Ferrer, found a tomb at the end of his extraordinary career. Up from the shore not far away rises the famous Basilica of Saint Anne d'Auray dating from the seventeenth century when the Mother of the Madonna appeared in the fields to a pious peasant. From Brittany stems the devotion to Saint Anne, which built the shrine of miracles at Beaupré upon the banks of the distant Saint Lawrence and the shell chapel at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, *ex voto* for Mother Theodore's preservation from shipwreck in 1843. At Quiberon farther along the rocky shore towards Brest the *émigré* troops and nobles who had landed from English ships in June, 1795, were massacred by the Republican army after they had surrendered. Among them was M. de Ginguéné, grandfather of Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Mary Joseph.

Away to the north on the other side of Brest the graceful spire of the cathedral of Saint Pol de Léon leads into a region unequalled in Europe for religious and historic memories clustering round the lifework of the Welsh monk Saint Pol. In the department of Côtes du Nord near the

city of Saint Briec was the ancient château of the Counts du Roscoät. At Saint Briec and in its vicinity Mother du Roscoät, Foundress of the Sisters of Providence, found the field of her early labors among the neglected children. Saint Briec, an Irish monk with eight disciples came to preach to the Armoricans, who erected at his tomb a shrine which later became an episcopal see. The local peasant bonnet, modified by Mère du Roscoät, became the familiar headdress of the Sisters of Providence, who adopted also the soft folded fichu and square bosom piece long seen in brilliant colors and rich fabrics in many of the peasant costumes of Brittany. This northern coast has been associated for centuries with the dangerous fisheries of Iceland, and with Newfoundland for even longer. Mother Theodore's nephew, a young man of eighteen, was drowned off the Grand Banks in 1855.

The Isle of Bréhat, a few miles off this Breton shore, was the birthplace of Aimée-Perrine Lecor, who because of her familiarity with the local patois, was of great assistance to Mother du Roscoät in her charitable labors among the peasants. Aimée Lecor followed her leader to Ruillé-sur-Loir and succeeded her in the Superior Generalship. Bréhat, the chief among a shoal of lesser islands, was strongly fortified during the wars of Louis XIV and of the Republic. Farther east not many miles lies Etables, birthplace of Mother Theodore, where the first twenty-five years of her life were spent. The town looks out on the melancholy grayish blue sea hemmed by granite rocks of brilliant reddish brown, gnawed and fringed in fantastic shapes and guarding a silvery, sandy beach. Along this shore the tiny bell towers of churches peering above the rocks and the close pines, reveal the villages hidden in the woods where prayers mount all during the Iceland season for the safety of the fishing fleet lost in the dim twilight of the Arctic sea.

On a lonely island off the granite rock of Saint Malo still farther east sleeps one of the greatest of the sons of Brittany, Chateaubriand, whose *Genius of Christianity* was a reveille to Catholic France after the Revolution. On one of the prehistoric barrows on the boundaries of Normandy rises the great ecclesiastical pile of Mont Saint Michel. Linked with Saint Malo on the Rance only a few miles away is Saint-Servan, beloved forever in the annals of the Sisters of Providence as the birthplace of Sisters Saint Francis Xavier and Mary Joseph Le Fer de la Motte. Down this pretty Rance river at Dinan rests the heart of the great hero of the Hundred Years War, Bertrand du Guesclin, his body in the Abbey of Saint Denis at Paris among the Kings of France.

Poetry flowered early on the Breton coast and reaching backward to earliest Christian times one comes upon the dreamland where Arthur and Guinevere held their court. Tristan and Iseult wandered perhaps along these precipitous capes, for the Breton *lai* is ancient, older even than the romance, but bards turned from the woes and wars of Arthur, the wizardry of Merlin, and the tragic and sinful drama of the Queen of Cornwall in Tintagel to sing the pure and heavenly story of the Grail. Roland, most princely of the heroes of the *chansons de gestes* and the romances, was a warden of the Marches of Brittany. North of the city of Fougères is a great forest of beeches, relic of the ancient wood which once covered

almost all the country and led still farther north into the fairy forest of Broceliande, haunt of Merlin and Vivian.

The character of the Bretons is not less striking than the history and legend of their native land. Matthew Arnold years ago analyzed the Celt's chief quality as the sentimental, always ready to react against the despotism of fate. Others read them as timid, shy, delicate, sensitive, and quick and keen to feel impressions, wistful and melancholy, with preponderating spiritual character, pure and lofty moral standards, devotion to religion and love for their priests, uprightness and valor, generosity and love for their hearths and their storied land, its customs, legends, and monuments. The Breton faith and courage never burned brighter than in the noble heart of the Foundress of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The Breton physiognomy resembles greatly that of the Celt across the Channel. They are a round-headed race, dark, stern, austere, but often spiritual, pure and attractive especially in combination with youth. Our early Breton parish priests in Indiana, especially Father John Corbe, resembled Irishmen. From this ancient and honorable race and amid its gorse-covered wastes and dark red granite cliffs near a fierce gray sea almost all the early apostles of Indiana came into being.

PART I

BACKGROUNDS IN FRANCE AND AMERICA

1806 - 1839

CHAPTER I

RUILLE-SUR-LOIR 1806-1839

"Our Congregation is so evidently and essentially the work of Divine Providence that neither its origin nor its development can be attributed to any other than God."

MOTHER MARY

F AINT, flickering candlelight fell on the rough walls and earthen floor of the farmhouse cellar and upon hastily-gathered ornaments brought forth from hiding for an improvised altar. Down the rude steps some faithful laborers of the countryside and their wives in sabots and peasant dress crept stealthily from the winter night of this rural section of central France, the ancient province of Maine. Outside, the faint breeze of coming dawn rustled through the darkened trees and across the bare vineyards and swayed in the fields the dried, dull grass of winter. It was dead of night at New Year's in 1796. Standing before the simple altar, his spare young frame in the sacerdotal vestments casting a weird shadow along the rude masonry of the walls and the old timbers above, a young priest was offering thus secretly for the first time at tremendous risks the august mysteries of our holy religion. Beneath his priestly robes, he wore the rough dress of an artisan. His attenuated features bore the impress of gravity and courage, and the exaltation of his recent ordination still shone in his dark eyes, whose glance revealed the steady and lofty flash of the heart devoted to danger.

His voice rose and fell in earnest devotion, but rapid in cadence with the urgency of the hour and its perilous occasion. Perhaps he mingled with the sacred syllables of the sacrifice a few words of simple exhortation to these devoted ones, his protectress and her husband, who had already suffered and dared so much for the cause of religion during these tragic times, and to the little group of worshippers from without who, kneeling hastily for the young priest's first blessing, hurried away across the fields into the deep gloom that preceded the pale winter dawn.

Swiftly in the dim light within, the little altar was dismantled, the crucifix, the precious ornaments and vestments concealed, the candles extinguished, and the old cellar, raised for a few brief moments to the vestibule of heaven, sank back to become again the repository of ancient wine casks and cobwebs. Up the obscure steps they went, the priest and his hosts, through the wide kitchen of the rambling farmhouse. But few words were spoken. The hour was too momentous, for a new career of heroism, the priesthood in perilous times had begun.

The twenty-eight-year-old priest was Jacques-François Dujarié, ordained secretly only a short time¹ before in Paris, tradition says, in a

¹ J. F. Alric, S.J., *La Congrégation de la Providence de Ruillé-sur-Loir, Notice Historique* (Tours, Alfred Mame et Fils, 1923), p. 9.

barn, by Bishop de la Tour Landry. The hospitable farmhouse where he was beginning thus his labors for God and souls was the Fosse Garnier² of the well-to-do miller and *propriétaire*, M. Aubry, and his wife, near Ruillé-sur-Loir. This was the time on the other side of the world when Mad Anthony Wayne, after the building of the historic fort on the Maumee in northern Indiana, was consolidating in the Treaty of Greenville the gains of his crushing defeat of Little Turtle, the Miami chief and his braves, among the broken thickets of Fallen Timbers; a time when a few farmer boatmen in light craft freighted with corn and its products, pork and whisky, drifted down the Mississippi to New Orleans in search of a market for pioneer farm commodities; and when America still ruled by the monumental honesty of Washington was being hurried toward a different regime by the political maneuvers of his opponents. Although he remained to the end ignorant of the remote Hoosier world awaiting the saving touch of his influence, this French country *curé*, Jacques-François Dujarié, has been venerated by the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in Europe and America for over a century as their Founder.

The times in France were tragic. The acrid smoke of fear and horror which, mounting to men's brains, drove them to a dementia of destruction, which history calls the Reign of Terror, had hardly died away. Brutalized by centuries of oppression, the *tiers état* had at long last brought down their tyrants in one of the worst social cataclysms known to the human race, the "deluge" foretold by one of their Kings, when royal and aristocratic blood flowed under the guillotine like water. During this period of horror, noble and devoted priests, of whom France had thousands, were driven into exile, or in Paris, disguised as scissors grinders or rag vendors, gained admission to the dreaded cells of the Conciergerie to console the condemned, or in the provinces, hounded from one hiding place to another, kept sheep by day in the mountain valleys and stole out at night to administer the sacraments. It has been said that the Revolution made saints. One of these was Jacques-François Dujarié.

Born December 9, 1767, of a humble, pious peasant family³ and reared in the little village of Sainte Marie-du-Bois in Bas Maine, now the Department of Mayenne, at the price of great sacrifices on the part of his family, he had been allowed to complete his classical education at Lassay and Saint-Ouen, at Ernée, and at the Eudist College at Domfront. Before leaving college, his reputation was already established. Brilliant talents were not his,⁴ but profound piety and a deep spirit of self-sacrifice, the stuff from which heroes are made. In 1787 despite the rumblings of the coming Revolutionary storm, he entered the seminary of Angers and had received minor orders⁵ when in 1790 the Revolution had destroyed all hope of further study and dispersed the seminarians.⁶ At Lassay he be-

² Belin, *La Révolution dans le Maine*, vol. 1, no. 4, "Clercs Manceaux," by Louis Calendini (Le Mans, 1925), p. 121.

³ According to Louis Calendini, Father Dujarié was born at Rennes-en-Grenouille.

⁴ Calendini, p. 121.

⁵ Brother Ephrem, C.S.C., *The Curé of Ruillé* (Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1941), p. 39.

⁶ Brother Ephrem places his departure as probably in 1791.

came a pedlar of linen and haberdashery, and afterwards, spent a year in hiding in a weaver's cellar in Chantenay. He is even said to have peddled licorice water in Paris, but suspicion pursued him unrelentingly. With his former professor, Abbé de Lahaie, however, at Ruillé he finally finished his studies after the fall of Robespierre in 1794. Many legends cluster about these years in his life, some of which history has rejected. Abbé Dujarié was at last secretly ordained within a few days subdeacon, deacon, and finally priest.⁷

Ruillé was then the little corner of a country, exhausted and bleeding from a thousand wounds, which the Revolution had left to Abbé Dujarié. The Concordat of 1801 permitted him, after secretly ministering to the people of Sarthe as auxiliary to Abbé de Lahaie for six years, to attempt openly the spiritual regeneration of a district, which after 1803⁸ became the scene of his lifework as Curé of Ruillé. The fifteen years of the Revolution had wiped out the clergy and had destroyed Christian education. His church was completely devastated, his people demoralized by fear and indifference. One of his first projects was a pious society with members of both sexes,⁹ but the spiritual and material destitution of his scattered flock and in particular the desperate necessity of reclaiming and instructing the neglected children, gave point to his search for some persons to devote themselves to this urgent need. One, then later two, devout young girls among his penitents took up the work in 1806. Thenceforward on Sunday, leading the children of his catechism class through the woods and along the byways, he directed them to pick up the stones from the rocky soil and place them in little heaps which later some kindhearted farmer would transport in his cart to the other end of the parish. Here his two workers were established, and here in the most distant part of the region known as the Heights of Ruillé, he built them a small cottage fashioned from the stones gathered by the children, and known since with veneration in the annals of the Sisters of Providence as *Petite Providence*.¹⁰ This poor little house, the cradle of the Community, still stands in the fields, three miles from the village of Ruillé in a veritable desert. Its one long room is divided into two parts and was used respectively as kitchen and refectory, schoolroom and Community room; for the first members of the group, even when they numbered but two, began at once to divide their activities. One instructed the children of the parish, the other devoted her time to visiting and caring for the sick and needy. For years the low attic served as dormitory.

Gradually the little group attracted new members, and Abbé Dujarié decided to confide seven of them to an excellent religious, foundress and superior for thirty years of a hospital for incurables at Baugé, a town about thirty miles away, Mme. Anne-Félicie Hardouin de la Girouardière, who consented to initiate them into the practices of the religious life and the proper care of the sick. These were the days of heroic efforts toward

⁷ Calendini gives December 26, 1795.

⁸ Alric, *La Congrégation de la Providence*, p. 9.

⁹ James J. Trahey, C.S.C., *The Brothers of Holy Cross* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1906), p. 17.

¹⁰ Alric, *La Congrégation de la Providence*, p. 9.

spiritual regeneration throughout France. The Congregation of Ruillé-sur-Loir was but one of twenty-eight similar societies founded in France between 1802 and 1815.¹¹ Catholic France, crushed and almost annihilated, was springing up with renewed life.

Whatever may have been his original views upon the little group, both Abbé Dujarié and his devout helpers were now definitely embarked upon a project of religious life. After a half year's training, the seven aspirants returned to Ruillé and were vested in a religious habit consisting of the Saint Brieuc peasant bonnet and a black costume, still worn by the Sisters in a modified form. The sleeves were narrow, however, and the veil reached only to the shoulders, the two ends being brought forward to fall over the chest. The Breton peasant bonnet altered by Mère du Roscoät was adopted and is still worn by the Sisters of Providence in France, also the peasant shawl, and square *piècette*, and apron.¹² By 1808 Father Dujarié felt able to accede to the requests of neighboring *curés* who sought members of the tiny group at Little Providence for their parishes to carry on elsewhere the work so advantageously begun in the fields of Ruillé. As their only rule he gave them brief written directions stressing zeal and fraternal charity.¹³ They taught in a few village schools especially in the diocese of Blois, Ternay, Savigny, Prunay, Thorée, and a few others, but further growth seemed to cease, and many difficulties hampered the work.¹⁴

In 1818 however the entrance at Ruillé of Mlle. Julie-Joséphine-Zoé Rolland du Roscoät, a young woman of noble birth, talent, and piety to which had been added an excellent education and long experience in good works, gave to the little group the leadership and impetus necessary to insure its continuance. Daughter of the Count Louis-Casimir Rolland du Roscoät, Mlle. du Roscoät was born at Nantes in 1779. The family was an ancient and honorable one in their native Brittany. Raoul Rolland was bishop of Tréguier in the fifteenth century, and during succeeding ages the family held distinguished positions especially in the wars of the times. Mlle. du Roscoät's father, a colonel in the royal army in 1791, left the country to fight with the Princes in Germany and later sought refuge in England. During his absence his wife and daughters had been reduced to utter poverty. Mlle. du Roscoät gave lessons in music and art and later with her sisters taught in the small school opened by their mother in Rennes. The insurrection of the slaves in Santo Domingo deprived the family of large possessions and still further reduced their circumstances, and the deaths of three of the children added the sting of personal griefs to their sufferings. The Count returned to France with the ill-starred expe-

¹¹ Alric, *La Congrégation de la Providence*, p. 7.

¹² The names of the original Sisters of Providence were Sister Saint Vincent de Paul Lavillain, economé at Ruillé (1820-1849), often mentioned in the letters of Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Francis Xavier; Sister Anne Lepine; Sister Marie Loiseau; Sister Justine Chauvin, Sister Euphrasie Blanchet; Sister Cecile Fouguet; Sister Françoise Garnier; Sister Julia Blanchet; Sister Félicité Boucher. (MS. History of the Congregation by Sister Basilide), Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Archives. Hereafter cited as S.M.W.A.

¹³ Alric, *La Congrégation de la Providence*, p. 10.

¹⁴ "En Marge d'une Grande Oeuvre," in *La Révolution dans le Maine*, nos. 38, 39.

dition of Quiberon but was fortunately sent on a mission to the interior of the country and escaped the blockade and subsequent executions.

Having regained a small part of their ancestral estate, the family eventually returned to the parish of Pléhedel near Saint Brieuc, to the Château du Roscoät, bought back through the sale of the family plate, which had been concealed by a faithful servant. After the Revolution, hoping to devote her life to God in a religious order for the relief of the ignorant and afflicted, Mlle. du Roscoät engaged in charitable work in the city of Saint Brieuc, where she maintained a small school for some six years. During a mission in that city in 1816, she was directed to Father Dujarié's little Community by Père de la Chapelle of the Fathers of the Faith, a name used by the French Jesuits during their suppression. Detained still two years longer by the solicitations of her family, Mlle. du Roscoät at last left home secretly after the death of her father in 1818, in despair of receiving the consent of her mother. She was then thirty-eight years of age. She arrived at Little Providence in a hunting dress with only a single change of apparel, having sold her gold watch en route to defray the expenses of her journey. At the sight of the little Community living in such abjection and poverty, her heart failed her, but she entered upon her novitiate with such devotedness and fervor that her difficulties and privations soon vanished. There were then at Little Providence only four Sisters and six novices under the direction of Sister Madeleine Beuché.

In 1811 Father Dujarié had built them a tiny chapel, twenty by eleven feet, dedicated to the Holy Family with a bas-relief of the Nativity of Our Lord over the altar, where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved.¹⁵ Mass was said here by Father Dujarié or his curate on Thursdays, but never on Sundays, when the Community had to rise at four and walk three miles in all sorts of weather to the village church for the early Mass and Holy Communion. There in a small room near the presbytery used for baking, they took their simple meals and spent their few moments of leisure between the services and their own devotions. Father Dujarié's servant Madelon was capricious in her attention to their needs, and the charitable lady, Mme. Aubry, who had concealed and befriended Father Dujarié during the Revolution, supplied their wants, and when they set out for Little Providence after Vespers, she often put an extra supply of meat into the basket which they carried with them for the week. In severe weather she invited the more fragile Sisters to spend Saturday night at her home.

From 1808 to 1817, the Community, confined to a few rural parishes along the Braye and the Loir, numbered only eighteen with seven small schools, two Sisters in each.¹⁶ Their hardships during all this time were very great, their food of the poorest, dry bread, cheese made from skim milk, and whatever amount of meat they could salvage from the meager weekly provision allowed them by the Founder, as they had no means of keeping it. Grapes they had too in the season, but having no well, they

¹⁵ Tradition says that it was the view of the poverty of Bethlehem in this picture which decided Mlle. du Roscoät to remain at Ruillé and share its hardships and penury.

¹⁶ Alric, *La Congrégation de la Providence*, p. 12.

had to carry water a mile and a half twice a day. Their spiritual privations were even greater, no stable or recognized standing in the Church, no rule, no vows or regular religious engagements, not even as yet episcopal approbation, their only director a busy priest charged with a large parish.

Their courage however never faltered. Mlle. du Roscoät received the name of Sister Marie Madeleine and was vested with the religious habit during the year of her entrance. Up to this time there had been very little regular organization and no reciprocity of obligation. The Sisters could withdraw when they wished, and the Founder could dismiss them with equal freedom. Now however he was convinced that his work under the direction of Mlle. du Roscoät would be permanent. He therefore introduced several modifications into the life led by the little Community, among them the yearly vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and a fourth vow of devotion to the education of youth and the care of the sick. Up to this time he had appointed the superior; now he established the choice of the Superior General by election for a term of three years. The unanimous votes of the Sisters fell upon Sister Marie Madeleine du Roscoät, who thereupon became the first Superior General and has always been considered the Foundress. In her new position she proved herself an angel of devotedness and charity. Her reputation for wisdom and sanctity attracted an increasing stream of recruits from her native Brittany.

Requests for new establishments became numerous. Courageously and devotedly Mother du Roscoät toiled night and day to console, direct, and encourage the Sisters, and to ameliorate the sufferings of the sick and of those among them who were old and infirm. The novices were trained to offer them every kind and gracious courtesy and to serve them in every way, and when the Sisters returned to Ruillé from the missions for the retreat, Mother du Roscoät, as she continued to be called, received them with the utmost kindness and affection. She also showed a truly apostolic zeal for the practice of the religious virtues, of which she gave from her entrance a shining example. Her room, still shown at Little Providence, was a tiny, dark, and airless closet opening a few steps up the stairs and hardly wide enough for a narrow cot and chair.

Little Providence, with its earthen floor and ramshackle tile roof which admitted the cold, rain, and snow into the dormitory where novices and Sisters all slept, had become so inadequate that Father Dujarié by selling all the property which he still owned in his native place and by soliciting aid in the parish and elsewhere, bought a small field in the valley near the parish church of Ruillé and put up a stone house, that part of the main building still standing, which extends from the chapel to the infirmary. The foundation of *la grande Providence*, as it was called, was laid in 1820. To the Sisters, long accustomed to the crowded quarters and inconvenient location of their Little Providence, it seemed indeed what they called it, "a fine house." Its windows looked out upon the hills and vineyards of the banks of the Loir, immortalized by the poet Ronsard, and the proximity of the parish church marked the end of most of the hardships of their primitive years.

The future of the Sisters assured, Father Dujarié, though sixty years of age and broken by the ravages of the gout and the hard labors of his pastorate, was now comparatively free to devote himself to a new project for the spiritual advantage of his parish and the vicinity. The idea of a Community of teaching Brothers, similar in organization to the Sisters, had been in his mind for some time, but he consulted many wise and learned priests before the year 1820 when he began to realize his idea. Two Brothers, his first recruits, were housed in the presbytery and had prayer, study, and meals in a single room twenty-seven feet square. A rat-infested garret was their dormitory, their chapel the parish church, and their spiritual exercises depended upon the busy *curé's* leisure. In addition to prayer and study, they assisted with whatever work was on hand, the harvest, the vintage, or in slaking the lime and assembling materials for the new convent.¹⁷ Four Brothers were received in 1820, in 1821 four more.

The Sisters seemed now well established. Universal esteem followed their new superior wherever she went, both from her own daughters and from seculars. Better organization was having a telling effect upon the morale of the little group. The missions now numbered twenty, and the new convent was under roof, when Mother du Roscoät left Ruillé on Easter Tuesday, 1822, at Father Dujarié's advice, to visit the houses in Brittany and attend a family conference at the Château du Roscoät for the purpose of settling the family estate. When she was leaving, as they thought, for an absence of at most a few weeks, Father Dujarié gave the Community the memorable prayer of Reunion to the Sacred Heart, abridged from a similar and much longer prayer by the great apostle of the devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Saint John Eudes, which till their Mother's death and to this day in every convent of the Sisters of Providence has been faithfully recited every three hours.¹⁸

Mother du Roscoät never saw Ruillé again. The Roscoät family had lost an income of from sixty to eighty thousand francs by the revolution in Santo Domingo in 1793, and when Mother du Roscoät and her brothers assembled at the Château du Roscoät, they hoped to be able to settle and improve their financial status. Only a short time after her arrival, however, the saintly superior was attacked by typhoid fever. Abbé Dujarié and the Sisters followed their Mother's illness with the deepest affection and concern. A Sister was despatched at once to the Château du Roscoät to care for her, and Mother du Roscoät's family, especially her eldest brother Amédée, Count du Roscoät and head of the family, and her youngest sister Cécile, responded to inquiries from Ruillé by frequent letters detailing her condition. The universal esteem and attachment in which she was held appeared in the continual supplications from all classes of people on the missions, which arose persistently to heaven in her behalf. Inquiries poured in daily. Count du Roscoät wrote on June 7 that his sister's life was despaired of, but a momentary improvement sent

¹⁷ Brother Ephrem, *The Curé of Ruillé*, p. 98.

¹⁸ The Prayer of Reunion was in no sense original with Father Dujarié. In structure and in content it is to be found almost intact in the Salutation to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary by St. John Eudes. The French original does not contain the invocation, "Heart most humble."

letters off to Ruillé on June 10 from both brother and sister waking again a hope for her recovery which had been almost extinguished. In a letter to Mère du Roscoät dated June 18, 1822, Father Dujarié tells her of the general rejoicing:

What joy for me and for our dear daughters to know that you are still alive! What thanksgiving to God who has given us back our very worthy Mother! I thought from your excellent M. Amédée's letter of the seventh that this devoted daughter was no longer on this earth. Oh, what tears of joy we shed on receiving his letter of the tenth which announced the happy news of your return to life. . . . We had seemed no longer alive but awaited in the saddest expectation the news that you were no more. . . . Your poor children of Providence were suffering. All gave me marks of the tenderest attachment for their worthy Mother. . . . They said, "Oh, if the good God would accept the sacrifice of my life for that of our Reverend Mother."

At once he sent word of the improvement in her condition to the Sisters on the missions, especially to those at some distance, to Montoire and to Vendôme, where he wrote to Mother du Roscoät, "your dear daughter, Sister Cécile, [later Mother Mary] is suffering the most acute anxiety." Mlle. Cécile du Roscoät had written to invite Father Dujarié to make the journey to Brittany to visit the invalid, but in view of her improvement and the urgent need of his presence with the Community at Ruillé while their Mother was away, he decided to postpone his trip till time for her return when the Grande Providence, already almost finished, would be awaiting her. Although the Sisters were suffocating in their tiny and crowded quarters at Little Providence in the warm summer weather, Father Dujarié had put off their taking possession of the new motherhouse.

I am going to redouble our efforts to prepare the House of Providence for your very dear daughters. Oh, what pain for me when I was obliged to go there and to think that my dear child would never live in it! What gloomy thoughts.

Madame de la Girouardière, who had trained the first group of Sisters at Baugé, and all her house had been storming heaven for the cure of the dying Mother. The founder now wrote to the invalid the good news and listed numbers of interested friends who had inquired.

Good M. Aubry, his wife and children and the servants of Mlles. Adam have shed tears of joy, mingling them with ours. All the Reverend Fathers, the town, the parish, deeply interested and afflicted at your situation, have come to rejoice with us.¹⁰

He sends her counsels for renewed care of her health. "I beg of you, worry about nothing. Think only of recovering completely. . . . We shall be happy enough, rich and satisfied enough, if our dear child lives and if she comes back to us here in good health." In response to news of a slight improvement in her condition, he wrote words of joy and encouragement. She died four days later, June 22, 1822. She was interred in the family plot in the cemetery of Pléhedel, and her remains, put later in the *ossuaire*, were thus lost to the Community, a misfortune which years have only served to accentuate.

¹⁰ S.M.W.A.

Mother du Roscoät governed the little group only about four years, but her experience, her wisdom and virtue had given even in that comparatively short time the seal of permanence to Father Dujarié's work in the Congregation. Her portrait handed down in the Community,²⁰ though imperfect in workmanship, shows a highbred and regular cast of countenance with the resigned and submissive expression so often seen in the faces of saints. Her brown eyes, framed in the long oval cap of the early years, are steadfast and full of the simple consciousness of reserve power, a gentle, amiable, and self-sacrificing personality. Her loss seemed irreparable; but God had prepared another, not so great or grand perhaps, but one upon whom the Holy Ghost would confer the needed powers to continue Mother du Roscoät's work.

The summer of 1822 therefore was a time of considerable anxiety for Father Dujarié. The Brothers had grown also and were able to open their first school in 1821, the year before the Sisters took up their residence in the new Grande Providence at the entrance of the little town of Ruillé. With eight schools in operation, the Brothers were requiring much of the busy *curé's* attention and now the Sisters, bereft of their capable and devoted superior, were again the object of care and thought and prayer. They had not yet occupied the roomy and commodious convent at Ruillé when Mother du Roscoät died, but the work continued to go forward, and they took possession in September, 1822. All devoted themselves with earnestness and fervor to the exercises of the retreat and to the necessary election which ensued. Mother du Roscoät is said when dying to have pointed out as her probable successor, Sister Cécile Lecor, and the final scrutiny revealed that upon her had fallen the choice of the Community for their Superior General. She was thirty years of age, of a hardy peasant family from the Isle of Bréhat, and had only just finished her novitiate, having entered April 20, 1820.

A sailor's daughter, Perrine-Aimée Lecor had been brought up carefully by a pious mother, who endeavored to supply for the absence on the island of both parish priest and teacher. Her youth was spent in the hard labor of the fields, and her only thought was of establishing herself in the world. One day when passing a church she heard an interior voice calling her to replace her aunt, who had been before our Lord exposed on the altar since morning. She emerged from the church an altered person. Soon afterwards she became a tertiary of Saint Francis, and at the meetings of the organization at Kérity near Paimpol²¹ she made the acquaintance of Mlle. du Roscoät, who, in 1815 asked her to take charge of a class of children near the Château du Roscoät in the parish of Pléhedel, at the modest salary of twenty francs a year. Aimée did this with greater readiness because of an insistent interior voice which said to her again and again, "I have chosen you to instruct others."

But all this time she had no other thought than of marriage and had gone so far as to return to the island for the ceremony when she felt obliged to speak to her confessor concerning the urgent interior warnings she had received that she was to belong to God alone. The good priest

²⁰ Painted by her mother.

²¹ Alric, *La Congrégation de la Providence*, p. 23.

advised her to give up all thought of marriage and to consecrate her virginity to God. At her request he permitted her to take a vow of perpetual virginity that very day before she left the church. During these years Aimée Lecor, by her knowledge of the Breton tongue, the only language of most of the people, which Mlle. du Roscoät could understand but could never speak, was able to render very distinguished service to the Count's daughter in their charitable work in the vicinity of Pléhedel. They labored together for some years, and Perrine-Aimée Lecor replaced Mlle. du Roscoät when the latter left for Ruillé and eventually followed her into the novitiate.

Ignorant and inexperienced as she was, Aimée had at first looked forward to the career of a lay Sister, but Mother du Roscoät sent her on mission to Vendôme where she remained till the summer of her election as Superior General. The Breton patois was her native tongue, and she says herself that her knowledge of French was very imperfect, but her previous life of penance and prayer had prepared her better than she knew, and God came to the assistance of her weakness. Owing to her inexperience and to her short time in religion, she laid her burden at the feet of Our Blessed Lady and exchanged her name of Sister Cécile for that of Mother Mary, by which she was known in the Community for over fifty years. Later she once said when questioned in regard to her feelings when elected Superior General, "After praying and abandoning myself entirely to God, I felt such courage that if I had seen the heavens about to fall, I would have stretched out my arms to receive them." At Mère du Roscoät's death in 1822, the Community numbered fifty Sisters with twenty houses, fourteen of which had been founded by her. Mother Mary was able to administer almost alone the affairs of the Community and to found thirty-eight new houses during the first nine years of her superiorship.

On November 19, 1826, a royal decree approved the Congregation and gave it legal existence as a corporation,²² and Father Dujarié handed over to the Sisters the convent at Ruillé, Little Providence, and some other real estate of which he was possessed. He had again called upon members of another Community to assist in training the Sisters at Mother Mary's accession, and two Sisters of the Community of Evron, a town not far from Ruillé, remained with the Sisters at Ruillé till at Father Dujarié's request, they withdrew in 1825. The Brothers were a little later approved by royal decree and in November, 1824, had been installed in a commodious house with a garden purchased by Father Dujarié in the village and called "the grand Saint Joseph." The Sisters were growing also, however, and the first particular council, organized at Mother Mary's request in September, 1831, brought much needed assistance to the Superior General in the government of the Community. It consisted of the Superior General, two assistants, the secretary, an econome, and the mistress of novices. At this time Mother Saint-Charles became Superior General.

The Sisters were now self-supporting, and the Community was increasing and prospering. The same, however, was not true of the Brothers.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

They were not as yet firmly established,²³ and as they were not obliged, as the Sisters were, to furnish a dowry and yet were very numerous, their maintenance was a heavy financial charge which was borne almost exclusively by the Sisters. The latter alone could borrow money, as they alone were incorporated, and they saw their debts increased by heavy loans made by Father Dujarié in their name. Faced with complete ruin, the Superiors in 1827 begged Father Dujarié to separate the finances of the two Communities,²⁴ thus far held in common and administered by the Founder, but in vain. By 1830 their debts amounted to many thousands of francs and were rapidly increasing. The existence of both Communities was menaced. Finally the Sisters appealed to Monseigneur Carron, Bishop of Le Mans. His Lordship came to Ruillé for three days in April, 1831, with his Vicar General, M. Bouvier, and the result of their inquiry into the circumstances was that the Sisters assumed all the debts of both Congregations, something more than twenty-five thousand francs, and their finances were declared from 1827 separate and independent. The Sisters' affairs were henceforth to be administered by the Superior General, a separate chaplain and confessor would be appointed for them, and the goods held in common were to be divided between the two Congregations. In these momentous decisions the prime movers were, of course, Mother Mary and Bishop Carron, but Mother Saint Charles, third Superior General, first mistress of novices, and till her death in 1864, first assistant to Mother Mary, played a part in the development of the Community hardly inferior to that of Mother Mary herself.

Hélène Jolle, born in the small Château of Vilbejan near Rennes, in 1799, was the daughter of a Breton officer and a Dutch Protestant mother, who entered the Church in 1802 and died twelve years later.²⁵ Her daughter, an orphan at fifteen, was reared by her aunt, Mme. Trouessart, also a convert, and finished her education with the Ladies of St. Thomas at Villeneuve. She had entered at Ruillé in 1821 before Mother du Roscoät's death. Her exquisite and amiable character and her profound piety pointed her out at once to Mother Mary as an ideal mistress of novices, and from 1825 she had been assistant. The Revolution of 1830, a time of uncertainty and trial in many religious circles, and feared especially by those who had gone through the great Revolution, passed almost without effect upon the young Community, which after the election of the particular council, had the benefit of the advice and support of the Bishop, who from that time took the place earlier held by the Founder. The appointment of a special chaplain to the Community was also of great benefit, and from 1833 after the death of Bishop Carron, the Sisters enjoyed for twenty-one years the devoted supervision of the Most Reverend J. B. Bouvier, Bishop of Le Mans.

Despite the burden of his diocese, Bishop Bouvier wished to be the ecclesiastical superior of the Sisters. One of his first acts was to insist upon the erection of a new chapel, if the Sisters could accomplish it without incurring any debt. Since 1822 they had made use of one of the rooms

²³ Trahey, *The Brothers of Holy Cross*, p. 28.

²⁴ Brother Ephrem, *The Curé of Ruillé*, p. 164.

²⁵ Alric, *La Congrégation de la Providence*, p. 29.

in the Grande Providence, but it soon became so insufficient as to necessitate the Sisters' adjourning to the parish church for the exercises of the annual retreat. On March 19, 1835, Father Dujarié laid the cornerstone of the new chapel, which was built from the personal fortunes of several of the Sisters without any expense to the Community. Such were the ravages of advancing age and illness in the once vigorous constitution of the Founder that although supported by his curate, he was hardly able to make the tour of the building to bless it. Its Doric columns overlooking the garden, the new edifice rose to the right, west of the original construction. It still forms the centre of the existing buildings at Ruillé. On September 5, 1836, Bishop Bouvier dedicated it in honor of the Holy Family, like the little chapel at Petite Providence, and Mass was said in the new chapel almost every day by the *curé* or his vicar.

Six weeks later²⁶ Father Dujarié, broken in health and worn out by his years of zealous labor at Ruillé, resigned his pastorate and retired to spend his last years with his Brothers now affiliated to Abbé Moreau's Congregation of Holy Cross at Le Mans. Although not yet out of debt themselves, at his departure the Sisters assumed his considerable debts and paid him till his death a yearly pension of fifteen hundred francs. For a short time in the agreeable society of his Brothers, his strength revived. Abbé Moreau surrounded him with the utmost kindness and consideration, but when erysipelas attacked the aged priest in the early days of 1838, the physicians gave no hope. Abbé Moreau issued a circular letter to the members of the Congregation of Holy Cross after Father Dujarié's demise:

For some time his infirmities had been increasing sensibly, without however leading us to foresee the approaching end of a life so dear to us all. Erysipelas attacked one of his limbs about three weeks ago and caused us an anxiety which became more acute as the physicians seemed to share it. In spite of the appreciable diminution of his malady, we soon had no more hope of preserving his life. He grew worse suddenly to such a degree that we had hardly the time to administer the last sacraments and recite the prayers for the dying, when with hardly any agony he breathed his last sigh. . . . He greatly dreaded the decisive moment of death and was often heard to say, "What an account I shall have to render! How I would prefer to die after having lived as a simple Brother."²⁷

His death took place at Le Mans, February 17, 1838, at the age of seventy-one years and his remains were interred in the cemetery of Holy Cross at Le Mans.

The Sisters numbered in 1834 two hundred fifty-five professed with fifty-eight houses. They still had no written Rule and were observing the regulations established years before by Father Dujarié. They now besought Bishop Bouvier to supply this pressing need. After a certain time spent at the motherhouse in secular dress, longer or shorter, according to circumstances, the postulants were still privately vested and continued their novitiate on mission. All still took only yearly vows, although some

²⁶ *Histoire du T.R.P. Basile Moreau par une Religieuse de la Congrégation* (Montligeon, France, 1923), p. 77.

²⁷ Cf. Moreau, *Circular Letters*, Tr. by Rev. E. L. Heston, C.S.C. (Notre Dame, Ind., 1943), p. 7.



From Oil Painting at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from the Daguerreotype of 1855

MOTHER THEODORE GUÉRIN
1798-1856

Foundress of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods

"There was in her whole person an extraordinary charm. No one knew her without loving her, and no one ever spoke to her without carrying away a lasting remembrance."

LEON AUBINEAU



From Diorama at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods

From stones gathered in the fields Father Dujarié built in 1806 a little cottage on the heights of Ruillé.



From a Pencil Sketch by Sister Mary Joseph Le Fer in 1866

The enclosure of Ruillé-sur-Loir, surrounded by walls and diversified by a garden, a lake, woods, and the winding brook of Tortaigne, forms an agreeable picture.

were permitted after their twenty-fifth year to make perpetual vows. All these engagements were yet in the nature of private vows, as the Community had no definite approbation from the Ordinary. Bishop Bouvier consented to take up the task of writing a Rule for the Community, and he composed the Rule of 1835, which was gratefully and enthusiastically received by the Sisters and faithfully observed for many years.

The new Rule specified a long novitiate. A three-months period of probation at the motherhouse for the postulants was followed by at least an entire year still in secular dress and still at the motherhouse, after which they were solemnly vested and spent the two remaining years of their novitiate on mission. A three-months preparation at the motherhouse preceded profession. Their first vows were for five years to be renewed every five years, although with the Bishop's permission perpetual vows might be taken. Each Sister received a printed copy of this Rule in 1836. A new feeling of stability and security succeeded to the earlier uncertainty on the part of the Sisters as to the nature of their obligations, due to the wide discretion which had been retained by the Founder, which also communicated itself to the local superiors.

The Rule of 1835 had been published at Le Mans the same year it was written, and some copies of that primitive Rule are still treasured by the American Sisters of Providence.²⁸ A thin, flat, calf-bound duodecimo volume, the Rule proper is preceded by a brief historical notice on the origin of the Congregation. One hundred pages contain the new Rules and Constitutions followed by Bishop Bouvier's formal approbation dated September 8, 1835, and signed by the Bishop and his secretary and chancellor, Abbé Lottin, an old and tried friend of the Congregation. From the beginning the Sisters had as patrons, the Holy Family, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and the Infant Jesus, to whom each succeeding chapel, beginning with the little structure still standing at Little Providence, was dedicated, and the patronal feasts of the Community were fixed as the Assumption, St. Joseph's Day, and Christmas.

The object of the Congregation was from the first to honor Divine Providence and second its merciful designs upon mankind by devoting themselves to the education of young girls and to the solace of the miserable, and the spirit of the Congregation was great zeal for the glory of God and an ardent desire to acquire perfection and contribute to the sanctification of the neighbor. Bishop Bouvier retained in the Rule of 1835 the fourth vow established by the Founder to instruct children and to care for the sick. Not only every boarding school, but each house of whatever character had a free school for the poor children attached to it where, after the regular classes, they were taught sewing and kindred domestic arts. The Sisters were also obliged by their Rule to maintain a pharmacy in each establishment where remedies were provided free for the poor. The rich were also served, but at a moderate price, which was used for the upkeep of the pharmacy. These were the days of simple and easy social classifications.

The early Sisters of Providence rose as ever in all seasons at five

²⁸ S.M.W.A.

o'clock. Before leaving their rooms they must set everything in order, make the bed, and at least three times a week sweep the floor. After morning prayers and meditation, they recited the Little Hours of the Office of the Sacred Heart of Mary, followed by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. A quarter of an hour was permitted for breakfast at seven. At a quarter of twelve, particular examen, and at twelve dinner for half an hour with reading, were followed by recreation with some useful occupation till half past one. Vespers and Compline were said at four, and the Rosary and a half hour of spiritual reading and meditation began at six. Supper with reading at seven was succeeded by recreation again for an hour. At eight-thirty they said Matins, Lauds, and night prayers, closing with the points of meditation, and the retiring bell rang at nine-fifteen.

The hardships of the foundation days were somewhat ameliorated after the Sisters took up their residence at the Grande Providence at Ruillé, but their vow of poverty was stringently observed. In their sleeping rooms they were allowed a straw tick, a mattress, pillow, and curtains, but carpets, waxed floors, gold frames, and pictures of value were forbidden. The suffrages for the departed were much the same as today, but the five Paters and Aves and the De Profundis after a Sister's death were recited by the pupils also for nine days.

During Canon Lottin's stay in Rome in 1861 Pope Pius IX granted one hundred days indulgence, plenary once a month, to the Prayer of Reunion, which is printed for the first time in the 1862 edition of the Rule, and only then was its recitation made obligatory upon the Sisters. This revision also required the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin to be substituted for the Office of the Sacred Heart of Mary, although this change had been already made in 1859 when the Roman liturgy was adopted in the diocese of Le Mans. At this time the Rule was largely rewritten under the supervision of the Holy See, and it is this version which has come down to us and has been observed since both in Europe and in America. The Constitutions show much more revision than the Rules proper, many of which retain to this day the original wording of their venerated author Bishop Bouvier.

The Rule of 1835 was commended by the usual brief of laudation by the Holy See in 1843 and again at the request of Bishop Nanquette in 1859. In 1861 a number of alterations were indicated at Rome as preliminary to the final Papal approbation, which was ardently desired by the Community. Two devoted priests, Canon Lottin and Abbé Levrot, chaplain at Ruillé for thirty years, spent some months in Rome in 1861 at work on the required alterations in the Constitutions. The abrogation of superiorship on the part of the Bishop of Le Mans was one point which was insisted upon; another was the substitution of triennial vows followed by perpetual vows for the five-year engagements in force since 1835. In 1862, one hundred and fifty Sisters made perpetual vows under this new Rule, and about the same time the novices began to wear the white veil from reception to profession. The fourth vow was also discontinued. On these conditions the temporary approbation of 1861 became definitive, but through the intervention of the Ordinary, Mon-

seigneur Fillion,²⁹ this much desired favor did not come to the Community of Ruillé till 1881.

Twelve houses were opened by Mother Saint Charles during her two terms of three years as Superior General, among them Notre Dame de Rennes and Notre Dame du Pré at Le Mans. The Rule now forbade the Sisters receiving in general girls over fourteen as boarders. The election of 1837 replaced Mother Mary again at the head of the Community as Superior General. Mother Saint Charles became First Assistant, by dispensation, as Bishop Bouvier's Rule forbade the election of the retiring Superior General to the Council till after three years. Mother Mary remained in office by a series of dispensations for thirty-three years, and Mother Saint Charles remained assistant till her death in 1864, thirty-one years later. The government of the Community seemed to depend almost entirely for many years upon the exertions of these devoted religious, seconded for twenty-seven years by the zeal of Sister Eudoxie Morel, mistress of novices during that time.

Partly financed by generous contributions from the Countess de Marescot, the motherhouse had been gradually augmented during all these years, the park and garden enlarged. In 1833 the priests' house was built, in 1835 the chapel, in 1838 the boarding school, and in 1846 the former presbytery of Ruillé, Father Dujarié's residence, which was very near the convent and overlooked the garden, was added to the enclosure as an infirmary. In 1842 the new novitiate, an addition to the main building, was constructed extending from the chapel to the brook, and in 1850 Mother Mary began to surround the grounds with the present stone wall. Till that time the deceased Sisters had been buried in the parish cemetery of Ruillé, but in 1853 the Community acquired its own cemetery, where eventually³⁰ the remains of the venerable Founder were deposited in the crypt of the chapel dedicated to Saint Michael. In 1862 the Maison Saint Joseph, west of the existing buildings, was erected as an infirmary, and on September 8, 1855, the cornerstone of the present handsome Gothic church was laid by Abbé Chevereau, Vicar General; all this from funds amassed in advance, without subjecting the Community to any debt. The Aubrys, in addition to the Fosse Garnier where, owing to the friendliness of the neighboring magistrate, they were able to conceal Father Dujarié and other priests during the Revolution, owned a house and court on the outskirts of Ruillé which were eventually incorporated in the enclosure.

Promising subjects in considerable numbers had during these years joined the Congregation, which in 1842 counted three hundred and thirteen members in sixty-nine houses. In 1871 at Mother Mary's retirement the number of religious was seven hundred and fifty in one hundred and eighty-six establishments. Of the subjects of these early years, none perhaps was destined to serve it in a more distinguished manner by her devotedness and by her talents and sanctity than Anne-Thérèse Guérin, to be known as Sister Theodore, who entered the novitiate at Ruillé in

²⁹ *La Congrégation des Soeurs de la Providence de Ruillé-sur-Loir. Notice Historique* (Monnoyer, Le Mans, 1877), p. 210.

³⁰ Sept. 2, 1873.

the autumn of 1823. Pious, self-sacrificing, talented, and older than most of the novices, she was fitted by her natural and supernatural endowments to contribute much more than ordinary service. Born at Etables in the Côtes-du-Nord, October 2, 1798, Anne-Thérèse's childhood and youth fell in the turbulent post-Revolutionary period. Her father, Laurent Guérin, an officer in Napoleon's navy, was away from his family during most of her girlhood, and misfortunes of various kinds clouded the home. A younger brother was burned to death, and her father, who had been engaged in Napoleon's blockade of the Mediterranean ports, was robbed and murdered in a wood near Avignon, while on his way to Brittany on furlough to visit his family. Anne-Thérèse had been educated at home by a seminarian who had lived in the family, and she had the privilege of making her First Communion at the early age of ten years. After the loss of her father, she was obliged at fifteen to take full charge of the household as Mme. Guérin's health and spirits were alike completely crushed by the tragic occurrences in the family.

For ten years Anne-Thérèse bore the burden of responsibility and the cross of deferred hope regarding her own vocation, and was able to enter the novitiate at Ruillé only at the age of twenty-five years in 1823. Mother du Roscoät had been dead but one year, and her memory was still vivid among all the Sisters. The Community was still governed by the regulations of Father Dujarié, whose personality and direction were dominant during all Sister Theodore's early years in the Congregation. When this devout and serious-minded young woman crossed the threshold of Ruillé-sur-Loir, she was already well versed in the lore of sacrifice. She fell at once under the compelling influence of Mother Mary, who recognized her ability and singled her out for immediate responsibility. These two lives for better or for worse could never more be separated while they endured, and in the designs of God, Mother Mary was the one to contribute more perhaps than any other to Sister Theodore's ultimate sanctification. As she had shown the utmost earnestness and fervor and especially as her health had failed during her postulancy, she was vested after about six months and sent on mission to Preuilly-sur-Claise, a village in the department of Indre-et-Loire, boasting one of the most beautiful Romanesque churches in Touraine dating from the twelfth century. Mother du Roscoät's influence was still felt in the Community, and Mother Mary was in her tentative and apprentice year of superiorship. She had no hesitation in appointing Sister Theodore local superior of one of the largest houses in the Community on the day of her profession as she herself had become Superior General under almost the same circumstances. The following September, therefore, at the annual retreat Sister Theodore was canonically clothed in the religious habit and professed and the same day named superior of the school opened recently in the city of Rennes.

Mother Mary's portrait, still preserved, shows a masterly and compelling countenance. Seated in a tall, carved chair, she looks forth with an intelligent, steadfast, and appraising gaze, her strongly marked but regular features little impaired by age. Her very pose, her dress, and attitude reveal how profound was the impression of her personality upon the Community. Hardly is she recognizable as the daughter of Mère du

Roscoät. The habit is definitely fixed in the form which it retains to this day in France, the cap shorter and square rather than oval as in Mother du Roscoät's portrait, the fichu and cross of bone suspended from the neck such as they are still worn. Sternness and vigor were her main characteristics. As time went on however, the association of Mother Saint Charles's mild, gentle, and attractive personality in the government of the Community offered a needed foil to Mother Mary's severity.

The falls of princes have been in the literatures of nations a perennial source of interest. The steps by which the great and near great of history fell from their lofty pinnacle were gathered down the centuries, pored over, and eventually immortalized in the deathless tragedies of the world. To this painful but noble destiny Sister Theodore was now to bow. Her first eight or nine years in the Community were filled to repletion with absorbing duties, blessed to the utmost with what the world calls success. At Rennes by her talent and zeal she accomplished the reform of a district disorderly even to defiance of law, and won encomiums everywhere from prelates, clergy, and the laity for her wise and zealous procedure. She was loved and esteemed by all. But this sunny life of congenial work and happiness was doomed not to continue, and the cross found her out. From her place in the sun she was suddenly and irrevocably snatched away. No longer in favor, removed from the scene of her eminently successful labors in one of the largest parishes in the capital of Brittany, she had to bow beneath the cloud of disapproval, bearing as best she could the reversal of fortune which had come upon her.

The loyal and affectionate heart, which to Mother Theodore's last days was her first claim to the love and devotion of her Sisters, rendered this cross particularly heavy. At times it almost crushed her, and its duration made it only the more poignant, as Mother Mary changed only after several years. All during her early trials in America, Mother Theodore stood almost alone, more or less under a cloud. This was her deepest sorrow. She often said so, and its special poignancy comes from the heavy crosses she had to bear almost alone. Her superior, having once lost confidence in her, altered her judgment very slowly. To Mother Theodore's lasting credit it is, that despite what amounted to injustice and harshness in the first place and later neglect and indifference, she respected, honored, and loved her harsh superior constantly and in spite of everything to the very end. But why this seemingly unmerited severity?

The separation from the Brothers, involving as it did, a severance of relations with their loved and venerated Founder, was, though approved in the main, a source of sorrow to many of the Sisters. Father Dujarié had left Ruillé in October, 1836, but he was back again in June, 1837.³¹ Seeing him one day sitting alone and disconsolate in the little wood, Sister Theodore went quickly to the kitchen and made for the aged priest a bowl of strengthening broth. Was this the tiny circumstance, interpreted as disloyalty to the Superior's decision to separate from Father Dujarié's direct rule, which brought about the rift with Mother Mary? Tradition current in the Community for many years says that it was. Another version has it that an innocent remark led to the conclusion that "Sister Theodore

³¹ Alric, *La Congrégation de la Providence*, p. 33.

was not in sympathy with a certain measure to which the Superior General was necessitated to have recourse."³² That it was the separation from the Brothers may or may not be true, but from this time on the misunderstanding grew and for many years continued to be the heaviest cross which Sister Theodore had to bear.

At Soulaines, a tiny village in the vicinity of Angers, a totally new round of duties came to her. Sister Theodore, gifted with a natural aptitude for the care of the sick, devoted herself to this duty with considerable success and took a course of training in nursing and materia medica from the local physician, which was further supplemented by some weeks of more advanced study in Paris. She opened a pay school, and her teaching won the commendation of the inspectors of the neighboring academy of Angers and medallion decorations, which were conferred upon her publicly in the presence of the *curé* and the town authorities for the excellence of her methods in mathematics. At her request the old and ruinous church of Soulaines was replaced by a handsome and costly edifice built by the local nobleman, M. de la Bertaudière. She found a smaller round of duties to her hand, but she excelled and won a host of friends even in the tiny circle of little Soulaines. Here another vocation found her in the summer of 1839.

Sister Theodore was now forty-one years of age, in the height of her powers, wise, sincere, clever, prayerful, refined by suffering, unaware as yet of the immense destiny which Providence still held in store for her, ignorant that across the stormy Atlantic the hands of neglected children, more forgotten far than the unruly urchins of Rennes, were stretched out to her to beg her love and devotion. What did she know of Vincennes? In a thick forest of Indiana a little frame church had been built in 1837 on eleven acres bought by Bishop Bruté from Joseph Thralls, a Kentucky farmer, who had settled on the Wabash across from the frontier town of Terre Haute and had purchased the land which the government was selling to the colonists. And already Bishop Bruté had called the little mission Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Had Sister Theodore ever heard those loving words? Yet they were the name of the home of the Founder of her Congregation north of Ruillé in Haut Maine. What a coincidence and what an encouragement for the Sisters of Providence when they eventually found out their lowly convent hidden in the woods, that it had already been named by the saintly Bishop Bruté and for the home of their Founder. Truly they felt that Our Lady could say to them, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." "Nothing that is good has come to us," the Foundress used often to say later, "except through Mary."

³² Sister Mary Theodosia Mug, *Life and Life-Work of Mother Theodore Guérin* (Benziger Brothers, Inc., New York, 1904), p. 83.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUNDS IN AMERICA

"It is no disparagement of those holy and eminent men who have adorned the annals of the Catholic Church in this country—of a Carroll, a Cheverus, a Dubois, a Flaget—to say that no one ever exerted a more favorable influence in favor of the Catholic religion than Bishop Bruté."

JAMES ROOSEVELT BAYLEY

THE origins of Indiana are French. However, after Jacques Cartier, nearly a hundred years before the Puritans landed on Plymouth Rock, brought his hardy crew of Breton mariners from Saint Malo to Canada in 1534, very little attempt at settlement was made. Nothing was done to disturb the "few acres of snow," as Voltaire ironically dubbed the widespreading territory of New France. On the coast fishermen from Normandy and Brittany came annually, as is still the case, for the phenomenal catch of the Grand Banks, but the fierce and scattered savages continued to track game in the interior. With the seventeenth century, however, another regime came into power. The empire builder Champlain was colonizing Acadia in 1605. Six years later the Jesuits were in Nova Scotia. From then on under giants of intelligence and energy like Maisonneuve, Frontenac, Talon, and Bishop Laval de Montmorency, New France organized and grew and through exploration stretched out its boundaries west and south.

One of the first white men in Indiana was the Jesuit missionary, Claude Allouez (1686). LaSalle, "prince of explorers," whom Parkman considers one of the most remarkable of those whose names live in history, had, however, been in Indiana at the St. Joseph River near Lake Michigan in 1679.¹ The valuable Maumee portage at Fort Wayne was probably also used at this early period. The historic Wabash rising in the extreme northwest of the state of Ohio is separated only by this eight-mile marshy portage from the confluence of the St. Mary's, the eastern St. Joseph, and the Maumee rivers. Except for this short neck of land, Indian and Frenchman in birchbark canoe or pirogue could float from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. Southern and northern tribes met upon the waters of the Wabash. Thus the historic river emerges from the mists of history as an important link in the immense inland empire which in the seventeenth century owed fealty to King Louis XIV at Versailles and immortalized him thousands of leagues away in names like Louisville, St. Louis, Louisburg, Louisiana, and those of countless lesser geographical points. On the banks of the Wabash the shape and size of the United

¹G. J. Garraghan, *Chapters in Frontier History* (Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1934), p. 3.

States were determined during the Revolution.² The meandering inland river is pivotal in our history.

From the treasured Indian portage where Mad Anthony Wayne built his fort in 1794, the river flows westward across the state of Indiana, turning southwest at Lafayette and Covington, then winding south to become the Illinois border beyond Terre Haute and at last after a crooked course of almost five hundred miles enters the Ohio. LaSalle himself avers that he discovered the Belle Rivière, as the French called the Ohio, in 1667, and the *coureurs de bois* were on the Wabash not much later, developing the fur trade which sent such rich returns to the coffers of the French king.

The nomenclature of the Wabash Valley reveals the nation which colonized it. The bluffs along the Wabash had long been called Terre Haute or Highland by the French hunters and trappers. Similar names abound in states where the rolling surface justifies them. The commercial group founded in Vincennes in 1795, which bought the site of Terre Haute in 1816, over twenty years later, had already been named the Terre Haute Land Company. The locality was named therefore before a town was thought of. Sharp-eyed surveyors and prospectors scanning the river banks for a favorable town site rejected "Old Terre Haute" on a sharp bend in the river two miles higher up, where Harrison on his way to Tippecanoe in October, 1811, had built his fort. They chose a bluff sixty feet high with a good water supply and gravelly soil where the wandering Wabash ran straight south. It occupies at this point the eastern third of the five-mile-wide Wabash Valley. The river then washed the foot of the highland on which the town is built, the entire river bottom, as it was called, stretching along the opposite western shore.

All this country in the early days was thronged with Indians of various tribes. All were Algonquins, but owing to their nomadic habits no fixed abode can be assigned the different groups. The seeds of the French and Indian War were sown very early when the English traders and the French *coureurs de bois* came into conflict in the backwoods over the fur trade. The beaver was growing scarce in the East, and the English and their dreaded aids, the Iroquois, crossed the mountains to tap the western fur preserves. Though originally more successful in dealing with the Indians, the French soon found that their rivals, the English traders from Albany, could easily seduce the fragile loyalty of the redskins with their prices, one-third to one half lower, and their more desirable articles for exchange. Of money, of course, there was none; but beaver, mink, muskrat, deer, bear, and fox skins had a definite value, though the Indian was often cheated in the calico, knives, pots and pans, and trinkets which he coveted, and especially in the cheap whisky which braves and squaws drank to their destruction. LaSalle and Frontenac originated the scheme to occupy and hold the interior of the country by a chain of forts. When Vincennes was finally built by François Bissot, sieur de Vincennes, commissioned by the Louisiana government late in 1732 or early in 1733,³

² W. E. Wilson, *The Wabash* (Little and Ives, New York, 1940), p. 7.

³ Garraghan, *Chapters in Frontier History*, p. 7.

it was subsequent to the French military posts at Fort Wayne (1722) and Ouiatenon (1719 or 1720) near Lafayette on the Wabash.⁴

All along the historic waterway and its affluents clustered the cabins and wigwams of the six or seven tribes who hunted over the Indiana forests. Thwaites⁵ has grouped the American Indians on a philological or language basis into four great families of which the largest was the Algonquins, fifty to ninety thousand in number, scattered from Canada and Maine to Kentucky. The Iroquois, the southern Indians, and the Dakotahs make up the other families. When the Jesuits first labored among the Illinois Indians, as they were called, at Kaskaskia, 1677, they numbered about eleven thousand in eight tribes and comprised in their group the Indiana tribes: Kickapoos, Miamis, Weas, and Piankeshaws. Jean Baptiste Bissot de Vincennes went among the Miamis, who were then near Chicago, in 1698, and his son François, a youth of eighteen years, followed him later.

In 1717 the Illinois country, bound by every tie to the parent government at Quebec, was cut off at Paris from New France or Canada and allocated to the jurisdiction of Louisiana. The boundary line which ran east from the mouth of the Illinois River, crossing the Wabash above the present site of Terre Haute,⁶ placed all lower Indiana within the new and enlarged borders of the Louisiana Province. Here the bottom lands of the Wabash begin to narrow as one goes upstream, and this point marked the dividing line on the Wabash between the French provinces of Canada and Louisiana.⁷ Jealousies and heartburnings followed especially when François Bissot de Vincennes, who had been in command of the post at Ouiatenon for about four years,⁸ was sent to found the military post on the Wabash at a point beyond the recently established confines of New France. Two tanneries subservient to the fur trade had been built, one of them in 1702 near what is now Cairo, Illinois,⁹ which the French at that time considered to be on the Wabash.¹⁰

Vincennes had been the representative of New France among the Weas or Ouiatenons, then located up and down the Wabash but centering around the bend in the river at Fort Ouiatenon near Lafayette. Farther east were the powerful Miamis. They had numerous villages near Fort Wayne and westward, and north of Ouiatenon were the Potawatami and Ottawas. The Wabash Indians responded in general very poorly to the efforts of the missionaries, and few were converted. Many of the Potawatami, among them the illustrious Pokegan, however, were later Christianized by the labors of Badin, De Seille, and Petit. The Ottawas had a model Indian village at the famous Arbres Croches or Crooked Tree in Michigan, where Mother Mary Cecilia's mother spent her early life.

⁴ Dates are Garraghan's.

⁵ Quoted in J. H. Schlarman, *From Quebec to New Orleans* (Buechler Publishing Company, Belleville, Illinois, 1929), p. 9.

⁶ J. P. Dunn, *The Mission to the Ouabache* (Indiana Hist. Soc. Pub., vol. 3, no. 4, 1902), p. 280.

⁷ J. P. Dunn, *True Indian Stories* (Sentinel Printing Co., Indianapolis, 1908), p. 132.

⁸ Garraghan, *Chapters in Frontier History*, p. 6.

⁹ Schlarman, *From Quebec to New Orleans*, p. 266.

¹⁰ By a confusion of names the early cartographers called the lower Ohio the Ouabache.

South of Ouiatenon along the Wabash were Kickapoos near the mouth of the Vermilion River with a large Kickapoo village a little over thirty miles above Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. This fierce nomadic tribe, strangely hostile to the whites, claimed all the territory west of the Wabash to the Illinois River. At the time Terre Haute was settled, the Mascoutins, a sub-tribe of the Kickapoos, were on the opposite bank of the Wabash in the vicinity of Saint Mary's, the west banks being the general habitat of these two tribes, Kickapoos and Mascoutins. Near Charleston, Illinois, about twenty-five miles west of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, the Kickapoos had another village, but "they were much attached to the country along the Vermilion and General Harrison had great trouble in gaining their consent to cede it away."¹¹ There were several trading posts in the vicinity maintained by French Canadians from Vincennes, among them Brouillette's on the creek which still bears his name north of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and Pierre La Plante's agency at Fort Harrison. This small oblong tract only about twenty miles long was "one of the most beautiful that can be conceived and is moreover believed to contain a very rich copper mine."¹² The mine turned out to be cheap lead or alloy but had been worked crudely with great secrecy by the Indians for many years.

The Shawnees, Tecumseh's people, were once settled east of Vincennes, but their principal village in Harrison's time was Prophet's Town on the Wabash near the mouth of the Tippecanoe. The Wabash Salt Spring near Shawneetown, Illinois, was ceded to the United States in the treaty of Fort Wayne in 1803 and named for "the most conceited and warlike of the aborigines, the first at the battle and the last at the treaty."¹³ They showed no signs of Christianity. Delawares, gradually driven westward from Pennsylvania by the encroachments of the whites, found a final stand in southern Indiana between the Ohio and the White River. They had villages near Anderson and Muncie also, and John Conner traded with them at Connersville in the Whitewater Valley (1808).¹⁴ The White River district had been ceded to them by the Piankeshaws.

Near Terre Haute and farther down the Wabash the Weas had villages. Old Orchard Town or Risen Sun, "Weauteno," was on the site of Terre Haute. Beckwith speaks of other villages, one at this point and another across the river in Parke County near Rockville. The Indians were very numerous along Rocky River near the present sites of the Shades and Turkey Run Parks and on Raccoon Creek. Chippecoke or Brushwood, on the site of Vincennes, was once the main Piankeshaw village, and this small and friendly tribe lived near the French and occupied half the town of Vincennes.

The French and Indian War (1754-1763), which began in the Pennsylvania woods when Braddock's redcoats were almost annihilated by the

¹¹ H. W. Beckwith, *History of Vigo and Parke Counties* (Hill and Iddings, Chicago, 1880), p. 163.

¹² Harrison, quoted by Beckwith, p. 164.

¹³ G. R. Wilson, *Early Indiana Trails and Surveys* (Indiana Historical Society Publications, vol. 6, no. 3), p. 396.

¹⁴ J. L. Heineman, *The Indian Trail Down the Whitewater Valley* (Privately printed, Connersville, Indiana, 1915), p. 16.

French and their Indian allies, ended with the fall of Quebec under Montcalm and the young English general, James Wolfe, in 1759 and the subsequent loss of Canada. The Wabash valley was now the conquest of the English, and the Quebec Act in 1774 gave freedom of worship to the Catholics of Canada and the Midwest. This is now known to have roused the anger of the priest-hating English colonists on the Atlantic seaboard and contributed powerfully to their determination to break with England. After Lexington and Concord (1775) however, the Revolutionary War loomed with mighty possibilities of defeat, but by the help of the French army and navy after 1778, and by the genius of Washington, victory came at last at Yorktown in 1781. With the organization of the Northwest Territory in 1787, with Arthur St. Clair as governor, the government began to function against the British and their Indian allies. General Anthony Wayne's campaign in Washington's first term as President (1789-1793) led to the surrender of the British forts held since the Revolution (1795). The five states which made up the old Northwest Territory broke off one after another, and in 1800 Indiana Territory was organized. The War of 1812, undertaken out of resentment against British depredations on the high seas and the Western feeling that Canada could be easily overrun and annexed,¹⁵ was fought bitterly in the backwoods, but afterwards progress was steady; and in 1816 Indiana was admitted to the Union as a state.

William Henry Harrison received his appointment as Governor of Indiana Territory from President Adams in 1800. Harrison was a Virginian of fine family. His father had been a signer of the Declaration of Independence and governor of his state, then the first in the Union, and his wife was a member of the distinguished Symmes family of Ohio. He at once bought three hundred acres of Indiana land and began the construction of his handsome brick mansion¹⁶ in the walnut grove, which is still one of the fine old landmarks of Vincennes. "My plantation of Grouseland," he called it. But one gnarled old giant remains today of the magnificent stand of walnut trees which surrounded it.

In 1800 Indiana was almost all Indian country. Only two white spots west of the Gore broke the continuity of this immense Indian land: the Vincennes grant, a very old concession from the French Crown later confirmed by the United States government, and George Rogers Clark's Grant near the falls of the Ohio to the soldiers who made up his famous expedition of 1779. The Vincennes grant comprised over a million and a half acres; its northern boundary began near Merom on the Wabash, ran east as far as Orleans, then southwest almost to St. Meinrad and west to Mt. Carmel and Palestine in Illinois. This vast acreage was originally a direct gift to the old Vincennes French from the Indians in 1742. The grant to Clark's officers and men near the Falls of the Ohio terminating in the town of New Albany comprised 149,000 acres. In Mad Anthony Wayne's treaty of Greenville in 1795, after his crushing victory over Little Turtle

¹⁵ F. L. Paxson, *History of the American Frontier* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1924), p. 171.

¹⁶ Lee Burns, *Life in Old Vincennes* (Indiana Historical Society Publications, vol. 8, no. 9, 1929), p. 445.

at Fallen Timbers, the Indians gave up all right to Clark's grant and to the "Gore," a triangular tract bordering on the new state of Ohio with Richmond at its apex and Lawrenceburg, once a flourishing river town rivaling Cincinnati, at its base on the Ohio River. This was the lovely Whitewater Valley, one of the first colonized sections of Indiana.

Gradually after 1800, settlers flocked into the region south of Vincennes, which was well advertised by Clark's returning soldiers. Although the government recognized the claims of the Indians to every foot of the rich and inviting country, the land-hungry settlers who thronged across the Ohio from Kentucky or down from Wheeling or Cincinnati, were ever clamoring successfully for homes. It was Harrison's task to supply this need. This it was, his gradual wresting of their ancient hunting grounds from the failing grasp of the red men, rather than his dubious success at Tippecanoe, which paved the way to the White House for the man who now took up the government of the newly carved Territory of Indiana. He walked over the Ten o'Clock Line to the Presidency.

Indiana's historical map is crisscrossed in different directions by oblique lines which mark the gradual acquisition of the Indian lands. The country was cut by the century-old trails, narrow furrows, ankle or even knee-deep, formed by the peculiar general Indian practice of traveling single file one foot placed directly in advance of the other. The old Buffalo Trace ran along high ground from the Wabash at St. Francisville where the small pointed hoofs of the immense herds of buffalo, which thronged the prairies in the eighteenth century, broke through the underbrush and cut a swathe often more than twenty feet wide through the dense woods across the southern part of the state to the Falls of the Ohio. The first mail route followed this trail¹⁷ and the first stage coach from Louisville to Vincennes in 1820. There these gregarious animals crossed to the salt licks of Kentucky where their bones are piled like a pavement in the swamps. Their number was incredible. They literally darkened the western prairies, but generally avoided the timber lands.

Other Indian trails, all of them shadowed with the memory of bitter fights with the whites, came up from the Ohio River; one called Red Banks, from the color of the river banks, led from Evansville to Vincennes; another called Yellow Banks came from Rockport and joined the Rome trail west of Huntingburg. Panthers hung from the trees above the trails, and Indians, trappers and hunters, settlers and pack horses thronged them after Indiana was gradually opened for settlement. Rangers patrolled the Buffalo Trace, at first on foot, later mounted, for the protection of emigrants. Kibby's road cut through to Cincinnati, the first to pierce the woods from French Lick where it joined the Buffalo Trace.

Up from Pensacola along the Wabash trail to the British fort at Malden over the Canadian border the Indians went with furs and returned with guns and trinkets and knives. The Indian population was greater on the Wabash and its affluents than anywhere else in the entire eastern country. This trail went up the east side and crossed the Wabash at Raccoon Creek, a few miles northeast of Clinton, Indiana. Harrison

¹⁷ G. R. Wilson, *History of Dubois County* (Privately printed, Jasper, Indiana, 1910), p. 28.

crossed here with his men en route to the Battle of Tippecanoe in October, 1811. French fur traders and American emigrants went up the east side of the Wabash to Terre Haute and then diagonally through Greencastle, Thorntown, and Marion to Fort Wayne. Another frequented trail followed the west side of the river passing not far from St. Mary's. All these trails led probably to Fort Wayne or to Vincennes, rightly called the Indian capital of Indiana.¹⁸

As a rule, the Indians and later the whites settled along the waterways, but until the treaty of 1804, the colonists could only buy land at the east in the Gore, or near Vincennes, or on Clark's grant. Harrison's first treaty of 1804 secured for the settlers the territory, twenty-five by one hundred miles, between the old Vincennes tract and the Ohio. Thus the precious Buffalo Trace, which traversed this district, was handed over to the whites. Kentucky settlers at once crowded into the new area, which extended from the Wabash on the west to the present town of New Albany.

More land was thrown open in the treaty of Grouseland (1806), which released for settlement the remaining southern section on the Ohio to the Gore, but when the Harrison Purchase Treaty was signed at Fort Wayne in 1809 and almost three million acres of the richest part of their ancient hunting grounds passed from the hands of the Indians forever, Tecumseh took up the cudgels against any further cessions.

Harrison's Purchase included the present site of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. It reached north from the Vincennes tract in an irregular parallelogram, its western side ranging out into the Illinois prairies about ten miles west of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, its northern line a diagonal running southwest from Racoon Creek just above Clinton, Indiana, north of Rosedale, a little north of Bridgeton, through Gosport, a few miles north of Bloomington to Brownstown, at a point somewhat northeast of Vincennes on the Grouseland Treaty line. This was the famous Ten o'Clock Line, the direct cause of Tecumseh's revolt and activities and of the bloody but indecisive battle of Tippecanoe. The Indians rejected the compass, averring that the white man could make it lie, and insisted that the Harrison Purchase line should follow the shadow of a staff at ten o'clock, thus giving the famous boundary its name. The line ran across Parke County from Montezuma and across the northwest corner of Clay County. It did not touch Vigo. The rectangular surveys, as carried out in Indiana previous to any sale of government lands, made claims easy to locate and precluded the interminable disputes over land titles which convulsed Kentucky and drove many settlers beyond its borders, among them Thomas Lincoln and his family including his famous son.

Rightly interpreting the blazing of forest trees by surveyors as the final writing on the wall for them, the Indians resisted the survey in every possible way. Tecumseh even then swore it should never be surveyed. As many of the Indians had not signed, he urged repudiation of the treaty, and he even intended to kill the chiefs who signed it. From this time on, Prophet's Town on the Tippecanoe became a center of furious disaffection toward the whites. Tecumseh and forty braves visited Har-

¹⁸ Wilson, *Early Indiana Trails and Surveys*, p. 362.

rison at Grouseland in 1810 in the famous walnut grove, where Tecumseh's angry words to Gibson interpreting for Harrison, "Tell him he lies," almost precipitated an Indian battle. Tecumseh and his brother were not chiefs, but agitators more powerful than any chief.¹⁹ Their tribe, the Shawnees, however, had no title to any of the lands ceded in the Harrison Purchase.

The original treaty was signed at Fort Wayne on September 30, 1809. On October 26 following, the Weas confirmed it at Vincennes, and on December 9 the Kickapoos, the last to sign of the tribes claiming the region. Tecumseh's emissaries kept out settlers, although the survey was finally carried through by John McDonald, government surveyor, in 1810, who traced the fatal Ten o'Clock Line. Beyond this wedge cutting downward southwest across lower Indiana from Brookville on the east to Brownstown, then up at an angle of forty-five degrees northwest to Raccoon Creek, all was Indian till 1810, two-thirds of the state. The Ten o'Clock Line with its wild hinterland of Indian country was only eighteen miles to the northeast of the present site of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Despite the furious resistance of the Indians, it was but seven years after Tippecanoe that the treaty of 1818 brought all the country up to the Wabash, from the point where it turns south at Lafayette to Fort Wayne, into the open for white colonization, an immense tract known as the New Purchase.

But long before this the Indiana Indians under one of the greatest of their leaders, the young Shawnee brave, Tecumseh, had made their last fatal stand for liberty. Those chiefs who had "touched the quill" at Harrison's behest at Fort Wayne were to Tecumseh traitors to the race, and he wrought upon all the Wabash Indians, rousing their hostility against the whites and banding them together to drive the settlers beyond the Ohio. The Miamis joined him, also their brothers, the Weas, and the Piankeshaws. These last had now become bitterly hostile to the Americans and migrated almost to a man in the mid-eighteenth century from the vicinity of Vincennes to Pickawillany on the Big Miami in Ohio. The Kickapoos, skillful marauders and horse thieves, always enemies of the whites, were prominent adherents of Tecumseh. The Shawnees, his own tribe, supported him and his brother, the one-eyed medicine man and false prophet, but the Delawares never joined with Tecumseh and were almost the only Wabash Indians who did not fight with the British against the Americans in the War of 1812. Tecumseh went south to enlist the help of the war-like Southern tribes, and in his absence, his astute enemy, Harrison, in the autumn of 1811 struck the blow which destroyed the fragile Indian organization and foiled their leader's plans.

With nine hundred regulars and Kentuckians, who hated the Shawnees for their bloody depredations and kidnappings of years, Harrison marched up the old trail on the east side of the Wabash. On October 10 they reached the high bluffs which John Tipton, historian of the expedition, calls "Tare Holt," where the apple orchard, probably one of the many

¹⁹ Paxson, *History of the American Frontier*, p. 163.

planted by Johnny Appleseed, was already a landmark.²⁰ Thick forest lay on the opposite or western bank of the river, but prairies along the east, and the whole teemed with Indians, a proof of its desirability. Erecting Fort Harrison on a point of land farther up, where the United States military reserve of thirteen hundred acres was later located, Harrison moved on, crossing the Ten o'Clock Line at Armysburg on Raccoon Creek, thus leading an armed force into Indian territory, a hostile act.

After the battle of Tippecanoe, the Kickapoos, far from cowed, and aware of the narrow margin by which Harrison had defeated them, staged a fierce and cunning attack on Fort Harrison on September 3, 1812. La Farine or Flour, the Kickapoo chief, planned it, and daringly approaching under cover of darkness, set fire to one of the blockhouses on the river side of the fort. Depleted by sickness, the garrison yet managed to put out the fire, mend the breach, and keep the savages at bay. Captain Zachary Taylor himself, who was in command, was ill at the time. The same band of Kickapoos a little later ambushed and killed a group of thirteen men en route to the fort with provisions from Vincennes and massacred the settlers at Pigeons' Roost in Scott County. Despite the continued hostility of the Indians, as soon as the surveys were completed in a certain area, the government land offices opened for sale to settlers. Owing to the marauding depredations of the Indians, settlement of the Harrison Purchase was delayed, however, till 1815 and later. Emigrants were detained at Vincennes or Fort Harrison as progress farther north was still considered dangerous. White life was confined till after 1817 to a district in which the principal points were Terre Haute and Richmond, Indiana, and Alton, Illinois.²¹

The War of 1812 intervened. News went out through the Indian country, "Kentucky is coming as thick as the leaves on the trees." After the Battle of the Thames when Tecumseh lay dead, and many an old grudge of border warfare had been paid off against the British, the Kickapoos left Indiana and Illinois for the trans-Mississippi where many went to Texas and joined the wild tribes of the plains.²² By 1818 the Indians had ceased to be a menace.

In the meantime, Terre Haute was plotted as a town in 1816 and Vigo County established two years later and named for the patriotic "Spanish Merchant" of Clark's time in Vincennes. The New York colony consisting of the Richardsons, Markles, and some others came down the Ohio and up the Wabash in large keel boats. Settlers hastened to purchase home sites when the sales began at Vincennes at the end of October, 1816. Many well known names figured among the first inhabitants of Terre Haute, men whose daughters were early pupils of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, besides the Markles and Richardsons, Hyacinth Lasselle, Thomas and Hugh Reed, the Lintons and McKeens and Jenckeses and Crawford and Booths. The west side of the river, however, lagged far behind in settlement, and almost all the forest land sales of territory com-

²⁰ "... tare hott an oald indian village on the East Sid of wabash on high Land near a Large Prairie. Peach and apletrees growing." *The John Tipton Papers*, (Indiana Historical Bureau, Indianapolis, vol. 1, 1942), p. 76.

²¹ Paxson, *History of the American Frontier*, p. 194.

²² Beckwith, *History of Vigo and Parke Counties*, p. 168.

prised within the present acreage of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were not recorded till fifteen years after Terre Haute was plotted and sold.

Like all the western rivers the historic Wabash runs normally only a few inches below the level of its five-and-a-half-mile-wide valley. The banks rise in three distinct levels: first, the bottoms, rich in alluvial soil and fertile, but subject to the yearly floods, which have at times taken on disastrous proportions; next, the terrace, thirty to forty feet above high water; and lastly, the bluffs, ninety to one hundred feet beyond it. The early land agents had chosen the site of Terre Haute partly for its lofty location sixty feet above the water. The river, which occupies only one-third of the bottom here, sweeps the foot of the bluff on which Terre Haute is built. The heavily timbered bottom land lies at this point all on the western side and expands both above and below Terre Haute considerably beyond its ordinary mile-wide proportions. Almost everywhere it was covered with oak, walnut, sycamore, beech, and elm trees of large and dense growth.

The second level or terrace, rising behind the bottom, is reached two and a half miles away at Macksville or McQuilkinsville, plotted in 1830 by Samuel McQuilkin, sometime postmaster of Terre Haute. He hoped that in time his town would share the growth of Terre Haute, but the high water and floods, which yearly cut it off for weeks from all approach to the city, checked for many years the development of what is now West Terre Haute. The second level has some prairie land with fine black soil. The prairies are, however, almost all on the east side of the river, giving to Terre Haute its early name of the Prairie City. These prairies reach almost to Vincennes, separated by numerous creeks and streams bordered with thick fringes of timber. "The prairies in the vicinity of Fort Harrison," writes an early surveyor, "exceed for beauty and richness anything I ever beheld."²³ The second terrace forms the Wabash Valley proper, as the river, dark green and tree bordered, sweeps southward. Here the distance from bluff to bluff on each side is five and a half miles with the third level far above the erratic water and beyond its highest flood mark.

Rolling hills all thickly grown with giant timber marked this last terrace, the Indiana forests, for beauty and valuable woods second to none in our country. All this region is underlaid with bituminous coal in several veins, and under much of it lies a serviceable sandstone. The sugar tree here spilled its delicious liquid in the spring in such abundance as to give its name to the township and to the winding creek which waters the hills. The locust flung aloft its scented blossoms, the oak and ash and sycamore towered in the autumn above the heavily freighted boughs of the nut trees, bearing in abundance pecan, hazel, and hickory nuts, chestnuts, and walnuts, nowhere so large or so delicious as on the Wabash.

In the 1820's only a few backwoodsmen lived over the river in the Sugar Creek country. The first permanent residents came to the western side of the river from 1833 on, seventeen years after Terre Haute was plotted. When the National Road was building through Macksville in 1835, McQuilkin opened a store frequented by the construction crews.

²³*Ibid.* (Parke County), p. 19.

Scattered permanent Catholic settlers²⁴ had penetrated the woods when Bishop Bruté in 1835 made his initial tour on horseback up the western section of his new diocese, looking everywhere for his Catholic flock. The easily tilled prairie lands of the eastern shore of the river were the first choice of the homeseekers and land speculators, but Thralls Station in the dense woods on the west bank of the Wabash had already attracted a little group of Catholic Kentuckians, who were penetrating farther and farther into Harrison's Purchase. The settlement was still insignificant, however, in 1840, three or four log cabins and a blacksmith's shop.

The earliest records of land entries upon the actual site of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, lying high on the wooded bluffs four miles back from the Wabash, bear the names of George and Polly Smith, whose patent from the United States government for a half section, where Providence Convent and the Church of the Immaculate Conception now stand and the greenhouses and Providence park north to the orchards, is dated 1825. Much of this convent homeland was first pre-empted by this pioneer farmer, who had been an aide and dispatch bearer to Washington during the Revolution and whose section of forest was no doubt a land grant for military service. His land patents were signed by Andrew Jackson. He came to Indiana in 1815 from North Carolina, and from him Joseph Thralls bought land in and about St. Mary's. The remains of George Smith and his wife rest appropriately under the quiet pines in the little pioneer cemetery past the old golf links, surrounded by the farms of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Dennis Hearn in 1831 acquired from the United States government the acres now given over to the orchards north of Providence, and Henry Holdway in 1835 bought also from the government in Martin Van Buren's time the rolling hills cut by deep ravines where now are St. Joseph's lake and the coal mine, on both sides of the Clinton Road. Jackson Longdon, a Terre Haute business man, and William Early in 1835 and G. F. Lambert in 1832, preceded as owners of this convent land the three brothers, Joseph, Jacob, and Francis Thralls who, however, invested heavily enough to give their name to the locality.

The Thrallses were Kentuckians of German extraction, from Elizabethtown in Nelson County. A Maryland emigrant, Isaac Thawles, is listed in Webb²⁵ among the arrivals at Pottinger's Creek, Kentucky, before 1800, and Richard Thralls of Prince George's County appears in the Maryland Census of 1790.

Joseph Thralls was at the North Arm Colony in Edgar County, Illinois, in 1824, where his son Isaac was born, and had married his wife Sarah Mattingly in 1815 before they left Kentucky. Thralls was a man of forty-six in 1840. He died in 1865, aged seventy-one years. Aunt Sally, as Mrs. Thralls was affectionately called, lived to the advanced age of eighty-three, dying at St. Mary's in 1876. Both are buried in the St. Mary's village cemetery. Their descendants are still living on part of their original farm in Vigo County. Francis Thralls gave one of his daughters very early to the Community, Sister Isidore. She was born in

²⁴ *Ibid.* (Vigo County), p. 54.

²⁵ B. J. Webb, *Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky* (C. A. Rogers, Louisville, 1884), p. 28.

1832 in Kentucky, and the family settled at St. Mary's in 1839, a year and some months before Mother Theodore's arrival.²⁶ She was one of the first to attend the free school opened in 1841 and entered the novitiate in 1852. Jacob Thralls's granddaughter, Sister Mary Amelia, Ann Thralls, and Joseph Thralls's granddaughter, Sister Alodia, Agnes Mooter, also became Sisters of Providence.

On May 26, 1838, was recorded the transfer which actually took place considerably earlier, over a year probably, during Bishop Bruté's visit in January, 1837: Joseph Thralls and Sarah Mattingly Thralls to S. G. Bruté for fifteen dollars the original site of the first church in Vigo County, about one acre in extent. The site is now marked by a granite tablet in Foley Court of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College. The farmers chopped down the trees for a small clearing, and there arose the little frame church, served by Father Buteux and unfortunately destroyed by fire in February, 1840. The only extant sketch is one by Sister Maurice, corrected by Brother Joseph, who was still living at Vincennes in 1881, and had taught the children of the settlers in the little pioneer church.

The first entries in the church records at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods date from January, 1837, when Father Stanislaus Buteux, a Eudist priest from Paris, brought from France by Bishop Bruté in the summer of 1836, was accompanied to Thralls Station by the Bishop and placed in charge. This mission included, moreover, the rising town of Terre Haute, with but few Catholics, however, and also the colony of Kentuckians in the northwest corner of Harrison's Purchase at the North Arm of the Grand Prairie. In 1831 Father Lawrence Picot of Vincennes had found twenty families there who had not seen a priest for six years or more.

Terre Haute by this time had grown prosperous with the building on Wabash Avenue out in the fields, of the Prairie House, later the Terre Haute House, called also Rose's Folly, by the rising financier and philanthropist, Chauncey Rose, a compelling figure in Vigo County history. A daily line of handsome stage coaches accommodating as many as twelve persons dashed along the National Road carrying the mail. A few pretentious residences had begun to appear, the first fruits of the success of professional men. The old Moffatt House had four imposing Grecian columns, a main structure and smaller wings on each side reminiscent of the old Maryland manors. The not less imposing Terre Haute Bank, with its fluted Doric pillars, still standing, gave dignity to Ohio Street, though the town in 1840 had only 2,300 inhabitants.

The Catholic settlement at the North Arm, fifteen miles farther northwest in the northern part of the Illinois section of Harrison's Purchase was almost as old as Terre Haute. In the early spring of 1817 Aloysius²⁷ Brown came up with his wife, Elizabeth Drury, and his first child, from Nelson County, Kentucky, at Father Stephen T. Badin's suggestion, to act in the absence of a priest as a leader of the new stream of Catholic

²⁶ Sister Isidore's statement that the family arrived in June, 1840, is not supported by the village church record, which notes the baptism of her sister, Margaret Isabelle Thralls, daughter of Francis Thralls and Nancy Rea, performed by Father Buteux, June 7, 1839.

²⁷ The Kentucky pronunciation was A-lóy-sius. The pioneers also said A-lóy-sia.

settlers. In the following spring his brother-in-law, Barnaby Reynolds and his wife, Monica Brown Reynolds,²⁸ and several of his brothers, also Kentuckians and Marylanders, followed, and within the next few years a number of Kentucky Catholics settled on the fine fertile prairies of Edgar County, where a strip of desirable land along the eastern boundary of Illinois was included in Harrison's Purchase and offered for sale at Vincennes in 1816. Among them were the Blanford, Lightfoot, Bodine, and McCarthy families. One of Bishop Bruté's first visits after his consecration in late October, 1834, was to this remote frontier region in February, 1835. He found from fifty to sixty Catholic families in the locality later known as Baldwinville, "truly zealous for their religion, talking of a church they would soon build." The Kickapoo Indians were still very numerous in this section, and the little Catholic Kentuckians played with the Indian children.

The missionaries could visit the scattered Catholics only very rarely. Twenty children had been baptized in 1831 by the Reverend Lawrence Picot, but there is no mention of the settlement at Thralls Station in the Catholic directory till 1837.²⁹ The Thrallses had come to Vigo County only at the time they acquired their large holdings on the present site of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1835. An article in the *Daily Express* of Terre Haute for May 21, 1869, probably written by the pastor, Reverend J. B. Chassé, records that Father Louis or Nicholas Petit, S.J., a Jesuit missionary attached to St. Mary's College, Kentucky, which had been taken over by this order in 1831 at the request of Bishop Flaget, visited Vincennes and other stations on the Wabash in 1832. Later in the same year he came to Terre Haute and celebrated Mass in the home of Mr. James Farrington, where Mrs. Susan Andrews Williams, at that time the only Catholic in Terre Haute, resided. In December, 1833, "another priest, also a native of France, then attached to the present Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier, Vincennes, now the Episcopal See of southern Indiana, visited Terre Haute, finding like his predecessor but one member of the Catholic Church in that now flourishing city, the estimable lady already mentioned. In company with Reverend Simon Petit Lalumiere, a native of Vincennes, who had just been ordained priest at Bardstown by Bishop Flaget, Father Petit later revisited Terre Haute in the course of missionary duty."

The ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Indiana had descended in an orderly progression from the early days of the French regime, when the entire region was dependent upon the Bishop of Quebec. An interregnum of doubtful jurisdiction by the Bishop of London followed the end of the French and Indian War, but after the American Revolution and the appointment of Father John Carroll as Prefect Apostolic in 1784, the district came under the charge of the Bishop of Baltimore, and when Bishop Benedict J. Flaget was consecrated Bishop of Bardstown, Kentucky, in 1810, Indiana became a part of his immense diocese. In 1834,

²⁸ Great grandmother of Dr. Richard Bohan.

²⁹ Father Picot's visit is noted in the *United States Catholic Miscellany*, XI (1831), p. 398.

Bishop Simon Gabriel Bruté was appointed to the see of Vincennes, his charge embracing all of Indiana and the eastern section of Illinois.

When Bruté, "the most learned man in America, departed for the wilderness with a boatload of books," the sleepy French frontier town, his episcopal see, had a hundred years of checkered history in its past. Its Cathedral records begin, however, only in 1749 with the record of a marriage signed by Sebastian Louis Meurin, S.J., first resident pastor of Vincennes. Only three later Jesuits³⁰ served the old post before the suppression of the order and their exile from the American missions in 1765 put an end to the devoted work of years and left the entire Illinois country without any priestly ministrations. Father Meurin alone was permitted to return but not to Vincennes. Some years later Father Pierre Gibault, a Canadian priest sent by the Bishop of Quebec to the Illinois missions, came to the neglected post at Vincennes. He found the people sunk in indifference and vice but overcome with emotion that at last someone had come to withdraw them from the brink of hell. Their entire spiritual status had deteriorated so much under the influence of association and intermarriage with the Indians that Father Gibault wrote of the young people that they were "reared like the savages among whom they live." The public notary, "Philibert *dit* or called Orléans," "chanter and guardian of the parish of St. Francis Xavier on the Wabash in the absence of the priest," officiated at church services and burials, where in default of the last Sacraments the following pathetic words appear again and again in the register, "He gave before all present signs of a Christian death," though Father Gibault avers that many died in despair.

During Father Gibault's residence in the Illinois country occurred the famous expedition of George Rogers Clark (1779) which added the Northwest Territory to the Union. Father Gibault and his friend and fellow Catholic, the Sardinian-born merchant, Francis Vigo, contributed more generously, each in his own field, than anyone else to the success of Clark's enterprise. As a result, the former offended his Canadian Bishop, and neither the generous priest nor the merchant received from our government any material acknowledgment of their distinguished services during years of need and neglect. Father Gibault eventually left Vincennes for New Madrid, where he died in poverty and his grave was washed away by the Mississippi, probably in the great earthquake of 1811, when the entire cemetery was swept into the river. Vigo's last years were clouded by penury and neglect and the abandonment of his religion. At the last he persistently refused the ministrations of the priest, Father Petit, during Bishop Bruté's absence in Europe, and his remains rest in the Protestant cemetery at Vincennes.

The easy pleasure-loving Canadian life of the old post fell into the shadow before the fierce onrush of Yankee settlers after the Revolution, and the saints' names faded away from its tree-shaded streets. Still at irregular intervals after Bishop John Carroll was appointed to the See of Baltimore, French priests were sent to minister to the people: in 1792 for two years the young Sulpician, Benedict Joseph Flaget, later Bishop of

³⁰ G. J. Garraghan, S.J., *Chapters in Frontier History*, p. 11.

Bardstown; and in 1795, Father John Francis Rivet, a saintly and gifted priest, the only one of the Vincennes missionaries to work to any extent among the Indians. Finally after Bishop Flaget was consecrated to the see of Bardstown in 1810 and henceforth at regular periods, missionaries came to Vincennes till the appointment as pastor in 1823 of Reverend John Leo Champomier, recently ordained by Bishop Flaget.

Father Champomier came to a town still largely French in spirit and character. The Canadians still wore the old French *capote*, or cloak, and handkerchief and came to church in the rude two-wheeled carts which were their only means of transportation. Many lived on the Catherinettes and other prairies below the town, where their four by forty arpent³¹ strips bore at one end in close proximity the distinctive peasant houses with high pitched roof and enclosed porch. The Trustee System, invented by Bishop Carroll³² to serve as a link between the new American Republic and the Catholic Church organization, had by this time penetrated to Vincennes, and the Vincennes Catholics were so deeply afflicted with the curse that they had shown a rooted aversion to contributing to the support of their pastor. Father Champomier withdrew in discouragement in 1831. Father Lawrence Picot followed him, and afterwards Father Nicholas Petit, S.J., from Kentucky, and Father Simon Lalumiere served Vincennes until at last in 1834 Simon William Gabriel Bruté, learned, saintly, and somewhat eccentric sometime Sulpician and professor at Mt. St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, and chaplain of Mother Seton's Emmitsburg Sisters of Charity, was appointed first Bishop of the see.

Then began that extraordinary career that, brief as it was, is still the glory of the diocese and church of Vincennes. His friends and earlier fellow Sulpicians, Flaget and David, were under no misapprehension when they recommended the fifty-five year old Bruté for the arduous labors of a frontier Bishop. Flaget gave him five years to live, a period which he did not quite fulfill.

Bishop Bruté was not physically a large man. His tomb, when opened during alterations in the crypt chapel of the Vincennes Cathedral within comparatively recent years, revealed a small white skeleton, the hands still clasping the pectoral cross.³³ His constitution, however, was originally cast in the hardy Breton mould, until the exposure of the continual journeys of a pioneer missionary Bishop undermined his once vigorous health. His imperfect pronunciation of English was aggravated by the loss of all his teeth, but one glance at his angelic countenance seemed to reveal the fire of zeal and divine love which burned in the heart of this simple, humble, learned man. The good he accomplished was incalculable. He had but one priest, the first native of Vincennes to be raised to the priesthood, Simon Petit, son of Antoine Petit *dit* Lalumiere.

A year's experience in Indiana had proved to the Bishop that the poverty and indifference of his flock at Vincennes were an insuperable obstacle to any expansion. But settlers were pouring into Indiana, a large proportion, especially the Irish, Germans, and Kentuckians, of the Catho-

³¹ A French land measure of from one to one and a half acres.

³² Peter Guilday, *History of the Councils of Baltimore* (Macmillan, N. Y., 1934), p. 63.

³³ Statement of Mr. Harry V. Somes.

lic faith. Priests he must have, otherwise souls in great numbers would be lost. Funds, too, were an absolute necessity, and for all, recruits and financial assistance, he must have recourse to the great vibrant missionary heart of Catholic France. The Society of the Propagation of the Faith with its headquarters in Paris and Lyons, founded in 1820, had already begun to pour its stream of golden charity into the needy dioceses of North America, and after 1829 the Leopoldine Society began to function for America exclusively. The Bishop had every reason for a trip to Europe, and in August, 1835, he embarked from New York for France. His phenomenal reputation for sanctity and zeal was recognized all over France during his year's search there for funds and priests. He landed in New York in July, 1836, with twenty³⁴ priests and clerics, a group which may truly be considered the flower of the younger clergy of France.

As Bishop Bruté said, he "accepted only the best." Among them were the beloved and saintly Benjamin Petit, who had renounced a brilliant career at the bar for the priesthood; James Marie Maurice Landes d'Aussac de Saint Palais, scion of a noble and wealthy family of La Salvetat in the south of France near Montpellier, distinguished since the twelfth century in the Crusades and the wars against the Moors, one of whose ancestors had been killed under Rochambeau in the American Revolutionary War; Michael Edgar Evelyn Gordon Shawe, son of an ancient English Catholic family and said to have been an officer in Wellington's army at Waterloo. Others younger but hardly less promising completed the group. "They took along with them at the same time large sums of money and great stores of all kinds to furnish the different missions in charge of which priests were to be appointed."³⁵ They were mostly like the Bishop himself, Bretons, and they asked nothing better than to share with him the hardships, the privations, and the loneliness of the Indiana mission. There were no Sulpicians among his new recruits. That famous order having given of its best to America during the French Revolution, Flaget, David, Richard, Eccleston, Maréchal, and others, had now in more peaceful times returned to its great vocation of educating priests for the altar.

When in Rennes in 1836, Bishop Bruté had asked Monseigneur de Lesquen to point out a priest who might later function as his coadjutor and succeed him in the diocese of Vincennes. The priest thus indicated to him was the learned and distinguished curate in Bishop Bruté's native parish of St. Germain, Abbé Célestin René Laurent Guynemer de la Hailandière. A native of Combourg, Abbé de la Hailandière had been educated for the law, and when only twenty-four years of age, had completed his studies and received an appointment in 1822 as judge at Redon. Now that Louis XVIII was on the throne, the old Legitimist families of Brittany, who had suffered so much for the Bourbon cause, had brilliant prospects. Suddenly, however, the young magistrate resigned his post and

³⁴ Bishop Bruté himself gives the number as twenty. Of these only eighteen came to the diocese of Vincennes.

³⁵ H. Alerding, *History of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Vincennes* (Carlton and Hollenbeck, Indianapolis, 1883), p. 167.

entered the seminary at Rennes. He later transferred to the famous Saint Sulpice in Paris, and was ordained in 1825. He had already served for some ten years in the sacred ministry at Rennes, during the time when Sister Theodore was doing her great work of reformation and rescue in the parish of Notre Dame in the same city, when he met Bishop Bruté and resolved to follow him across the Atlantic to the remote wilderness of Vincennes. He was at once named Vicar General.³⁶

Arrived in America, Bishop Bruté arranged for a few of his new recruits to finish their training in Maryland, and kept the priests near him for some time till their command of English would warrant their being placed upon the missions. Only one, Michael Shawe, could speak English. Archbishop Carroll was definitely opposed to receiving priests who could not speak English, but Bishop Bruté's priests were almost all young men, and he sent them out after five or six months. Father Saint-Palais³⁷ made rapid progress and was the first to be sent out in September, 1836;³⁸ the others followed by degrees. Father de la Hailandière was named pastor of the Vincennes Cathedral where the French-speaking congregation rendered his broken English a negligible matter. The Bishop was disappointed at his poor effort to learn. He "knows little English and makes no effort to acquire it," wrote Bishop Bruté in 1837.³⁹

By this time the church at the North Arm was built under Father Lalumiere's direction on a piece of ground from Aloysius Brown's farm and named for him as he had made and supplied the brick. Father Buteux, after January, 1837, in charge of the three scattered missions of Terre Haute, Thralls, and the North Arm, at once began services for all three places. He lived as a rule at Thralls, called by Bishop Bruté Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, in the tiny log cabin on the place, probably built by Joseph Thralls on his first arrival in Vigo County. At times, too, he lived in Terre Haute, as records of contributions for his support there are still preserved at St. Joseph's Church. Father Buteux's⁴⁰ record of baptisms, marriages, and burials at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, neatly set down in English and still preserved, began with a baptism on January 12, 1837.⁴¹

One of Father Buteux's earliest baptisms at Thralls Station was that of George Francis Thralls, son of Jacob and Matilda Thralls; godmother, Mary Jane Thralls, later Mrs. Hilary Alvey, January 20, 1837. The names of the pioneer Kentucky families who settled near St. Mary's appear at once on Father Buteux's church records: the Alveys and Sheerins and Curleys, the Hollands and Jarboes, the Wards and Cambrons. Among the early arrivals at St. Mary's to avail himself of the ministrations of Father Buteux was Noël or Christmas Dagenet, the Indian agent and interpreter for the remnant of Weas and Miamis still in the vicinity. He

³⁶ Alerding, *Diocese of Vincennes*, p. 165.

³⁷ Diocesan priests in America at that time used the title "Mister." Religious priests only were called Father.

³⁸ Sister Mary Salesia Godecker, *Simon Bruté de Rémur, First Bishop of Vincennes* (Saint Meinrad, Indiana, 1931), p. 289.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

⁴⁰ The North Arm Kentuckians had their own pronunciation of Father Buteux's difficult French name. Mother Anastasie tells us that they called him Father Bú-ty.

⁴¹ "William Henry, son of John Newcome and his wife."

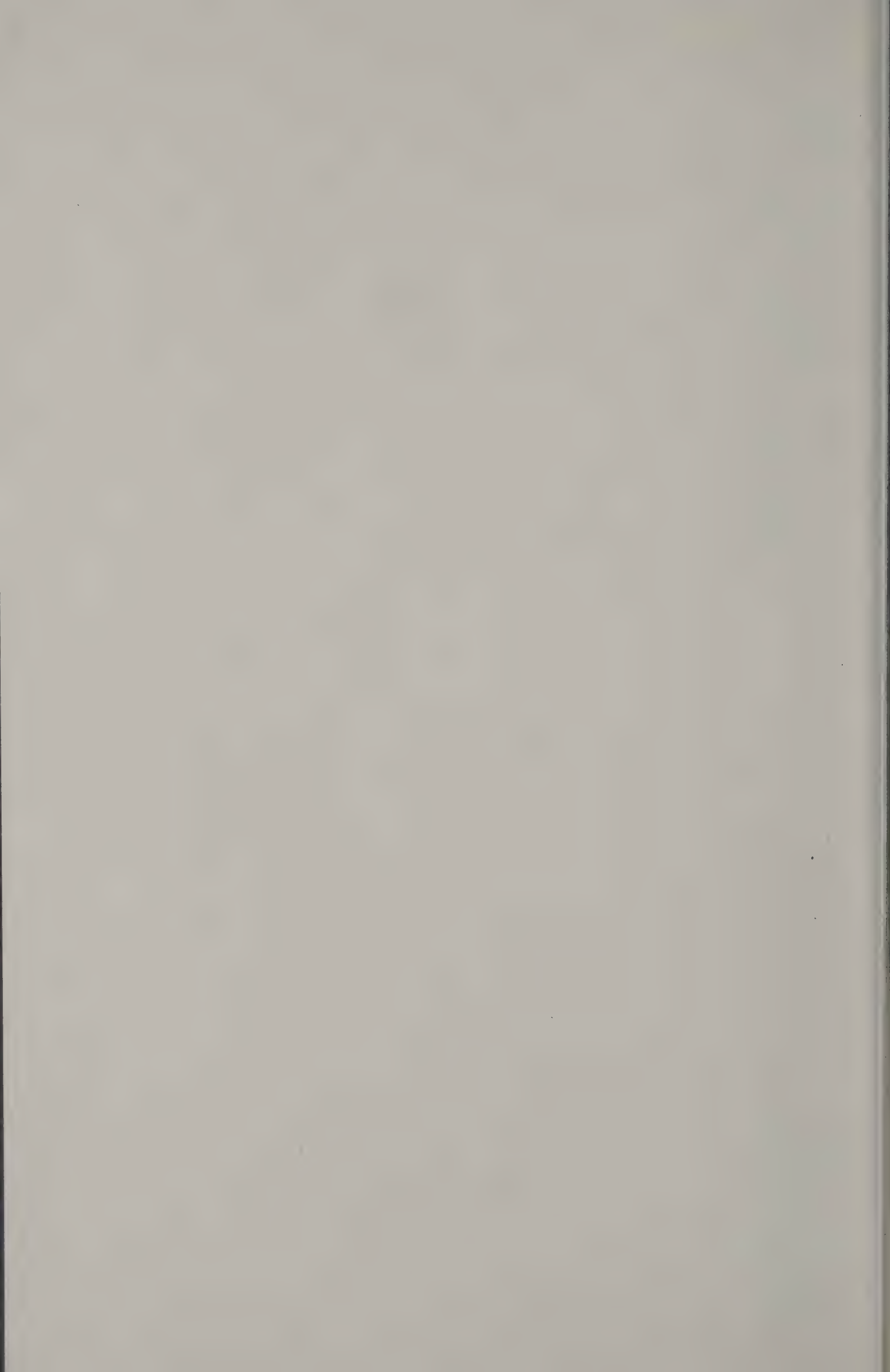
was accompanied by his children for baptism, Christmas, Hyacinth, and Edward, also later Emily, and his wife, Mary Ann Isaacs, a Brotherton Indian. Their marriage was blessed in 1841, having been performed twenty-two years earlier by Isaac McCoy, the Baptist missionary. Across the river in Parke County just north of Vigo, along Raccoon Creek and the Ten o'Clock Line, near the present towns of Clinton and Montezuma, the Indians were still numerous. Here Dagenet, called by the Americans "Dazney," had his mile-square grant from the government, near the reservation allowed to these Indians after the New Purchase was completed. Dagenet was the son of Ambrose Dagenet, a French trader at Kaskaskia and Vincennes, and Beautiful Shade Tree, daughter of the Wea chief, Jocco. "He had received a good education from the Catholics," says Beckwith, and dispensed the government annuities to the Indians at Fort Harrison till the garrison was withdrawn in 1822. Dagenet would not permit his children to attend Isaac McCoy's Baptist mission school for the Indians established near the present site of Bridgeton across the river from Fort Harrison. As the Catholic Indians of this region refused his ministrations, McCoy removed to Fort Wayne and later to the Carey site at Niles, Michigan, in 1822 where Joseph Bailly's children were among his pupils. Dagenet led the Indians from this region west and died in Kansas in 1873.

The tradition that Bishop Bruté once said of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, "Some day there will be Sisters here," and "You will see what great things will be accomplished here," may explain his locating Father Buteux at Thralls Station rather than at the North Arm, where the Catholic population was both older and more numerous and where plans for a brick church were already under way, or in the rising town of Terre Haute. Mrs. Susan Andrews Williams, long Terre Haute's only Catholic, lived for years in later life in St. Mary's village.⁴² Both she and her husband, W. W. Williams, who died in 1839, and a number of their children are buried in the village cemetery there. Bishop Alerding quotes the words of Reverend Eugene F. McBarron, pastor at the village from 1861 to 1869, "This good lady's house [in Terre Haute] was the only place of worship the Catholics had for many years till the arrival of Father Buteux in 1837."⁴³

⁴² She occupied the site later known as the Moran house, where in 1948 Mr. Andrew O'Dwyer resided.

⁴³ Alerding, *Diocese of Vincennes*, p. 453.

PART II
THE FOUNDATION
1840 - 1841



CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE

"This dear mission of Indiana, for which I sighed so long."

SISTER SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

BISHOP Bruté had longed from the first for Sisters. At his arrival in Vincennes immediately after his consecration in Saint Louis on October 28, 1834, one of his keenest disappointments was to find that the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, who since 1824 had maintained the school there, early in 1834 had been compelled by continued and serious spiritual privations to withdraw. The ignorance and neglect into which his former flock of Vincennes had fallen had induced Bishop Flaget of Bardstown to promise them Sisters from the rising Community of the Sisters of Charity just after he gave them their first permanent pastor in the person of young Father John Leo Champomier, a French cleric who had accompanied the Reverend Guy Ignatius Chabrat¹ to Kentucky in 1821, and was ordained at Bardstown by Bishop David in March, 1823. The young priest's career of seven years at Vincennes was beset with trials and disappointments, chief among them being the quasi-destitution in which he had to live. At the price of herculean efforts and by means of collecting tours and tilling the church lands to send the produce on flat boats for sale in New Orleans, Father Champomier succeeded in 1826 in completing the shell of the edifice which later became the Cathedral of Vincennes.

The little group of pioneer Sisters from Kentucky had arrived in March, 1824, and opened school at once. The Superior, Sister Harriet Gardiner, was one of the six original members to enter the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth after its foundation in 1812, and the first election in 1813, which had chosen Sister Catherine Spalding as Superior, had designated her as assistant. She was one of three members of the same family to enter the Nazareth Community, and her younger sister, Mother Frances Gardiner, was later Superior General for a number of years. Highly gifted intellectually and spiritually, cheerful, resourceful, and courageous, Sister Harriet was an ideal pioneer. When she came to Vincennes, she had already rendered distinguished service in Kentucky in the foundation of the first Nazareth school in 1814, and later of the Bethlehem school at Bardstown.

In addition to their school duties the Sisters as early as 1826 cared for two orphan girls, but the number of orphans increased somewhat with the years. The school took an active part in the parish activities. When the cornerstone of the new church was laid March 30, 1826, the procession of "matrons and men, young ladies and nuns" started from Saint Clare's Female School to the church site. High water kept visiting clergy away and compelled the indefatigable pastor to preach and officiate alone.

¹ Later (1834) consecrated Coadjutor Bishop of Bardstown.

Trials were the daily portion of both pastor and Sisters. The latter, however, never seemed to count their hardships, and under their devoted care the little mission showed an ephemeral success. Sister Harriet wrote to her sister, Sister Clare, in September, 1826, "Our school was very full all summer. . . . Our last examination was splendid, attended by nearly as many as the room would contain." Sister Harriet's career in Indiana, however, was destined to be brief. Sickness was rife, fevers which prostrated the inhabitants and finally overcame their untiring nurses, the Sisters. All four fell ill. Father Champomier went on a three-months collecting tour to the Eastern states and Canada, and during his absence Sister Harriet, deprived in her last hour of the precious consolations of religion, sank uncomplainingly into an unmarked grave in the little cemetery between the church and the river, October 7, 1826.

The advantages the Sisters offered in Saint Clare's academy and day school were exceptional, but the poverty and indifference of the people prevented their contributing to the Sisters' support any better than they had done to the pastor's maintenance. Many of the pupils could pay nothing. Even the gentle and saintly Flaget finally became disheartened and wrote to his old parishioners in Vincennes a letter of burning reproof in which he threatened to take away both priest and Sisters unless they were better treated.² Poverty and sickness, however, had not discouraged the Sisters, but their spiritual privations weighed more heavily upon them after Sister Harriet's untimely death. Father Champomier was still busily occupied with his church and was often absent in search of aid and materials, or in attendance upon his numerous and distant missions.³

In 1831 he finally withdrew, but under his successor, the Reverend Lawrence Picot, the Sisters fared no better. They must have hoped for more propitious times, however, for in February, 1833, they bought the two half lots upon which their school stood on Second and Vigo Streets, now bordering on the Memorial Plaza.⁴ After July, 1833, when Father Picot left Vincennes, they were dependent upon the intermittent visits of the Reverend Louis (Nicholas) Petit, S.J., president of the recently established Saint Mary's College in Marion County, Kentucky, and the Reverend Simon Petit Lalumiere, the first native of Vincennes to be raised to the priesthood, ordained by Bishop David in 1830 and sent by Bishop Flaget to Daviess County, Indiana.

Indiana was rapidly filling up, and that region was by this time well populated by the staunch Catholic families from Kentucky, many of them Marylanders, who had crossed the mountains in great numbers after the Revolution: Spaldings, Elders, Montgomerys, Mileses, Youngs, and Smiths. The Nazareth Sisters maintained a school here for a year in 1832.⁵ By this time, however, Bishop David, founder and ecclesiastical superior of the Nazareth Sisters, had become convinced that localities where religious privations were great and other difficulties insurmountable should be abandoned, and the Sisters placed where their usefulness

² Vincennes Old Cathedral Archives.

³ Godecker, *Simon Bruté de Rémur*, p. 184.

⁴ Record in Knox County Court House.

⁵ See Chapter XV.

would bear greater fruit.⁶ In March, 1834, therefore, some seven months before Bishop Bruté's consecration and arrival in Vincennes, the Sisters finally closed Saint Clare's School and returned to Nazareth. This was a period of transition in the history of the Kentucky Community. Bishop David had been replaced as Superior by the Reverend Ignatius A. Reynolds, later Bishop of Charleston, South Carolina, and Bishop Flaget, who had only recently returned from a two years stay in Europe, had learned there of the movement on foot to retire the Sulpicians from the direction of the Emmitsburg Sisters and to affiliate the latter with the French Sisters of Charity under the supervision of the Lazarist or Vincentian order. Seeking no doubt to benefit his Kentucky Sisters, Bishop Flaget now wished to alter the Nazareth habit, discontinue the office of ecclesiastical superior, and make the Kentucky Congregation an adjunct of Mother Seton's Community. This project disturbed the Kentucky Community more or less acutely till the final merger of Emmitsburg with France in 1849.

Bishop Bruté was deeply distressed at the loss of the Sisters, but he had been so long and so intimately associated with the Emmitsburg Community, both during the lifetime of Mother Seton and after her death, that it was thought her Sisters might wish to follow him to Vincennes,⁷ especially as they had already been established for some years in Saint Louis and Cincinnati. Such was not the case, however, or at least no Sisters came from Saint Joseph's at that time, and in March, 1835, the Nazareth Superiors with their accustomed disinterestedness agreed to send their Sisters after a year's absence again to Vincennes. But in October, 1836, shortly after Bishop Bruté's return from Europe, in view of the pressing demands upon the Community incident upon the opening of Saint Joseph's Infirmary in Louisville, it was decided at Nazareth to withdraw the Sisters permanently. The Reverend I. A. Reynolds arrived in Vincennes in December, 1836, empowered to arrange matters with Bishop Bruté and dispose of the school building⁸ and the real estate on Second and Vigo Streets.

Just here with the concurrence of the Nazareth Community, Bishop Bruté embarked upon the project of a separate and independent religious foundation in Vincennes. His sometime Sulpician brothers in Maryland and Kentucky had seen their similar efforts richly blessed by heaven, and several successful native religious Congregations had already developed in the growing United States. Bishop Bruté himself was a saintly and deeply spiritual man, Mother Seton's confessor for years and a skilled and prudent director of souls, fortified by years of experience at Emmitsburg. One can hardly wonder then that this idea should occur to him, and for a year with the aid of two Nazareth Sisters, Sister Sebastia and Sister Rosalia, who were willing to remain and whom the Community at Nazareth consented to give up, he essayed the role of founder. The

⁶ Sister Columba Fox, *Life of Right Rev. J. B. M. David* (U. S. Catholic Historical Society, New York, 1925), p. 131.

⁷ Anna Blanche McGill, *The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth* (Encyclopedia Press, New York, 1917), p. 110.

⁸ Nazareth Archives.

Vincennes Sisters are referred to in the *United States Catholic Almanac* for 1838 as the "Sisters of Charity of Vincennes."

Vincennes, however, was not Kentucky. The Bishop was fully occupied with his numerous family of French priests, engaged in study and not yet placed, and was often absent on long missionary journeys. As to the Sisters, although their school was prosperous, Bishop Bruté "doubted their ability to found an institution"⁹ and in the spring and summer of 1837, he wrote repeatedly to Mother Rose White at Emmitsburg urging her to send him two or three Sisters to take over the mission. His request was supported by Bishop David in Kentucky, who had preceded Bishop Bruté as chaplain of Mother Seton's Community (1809-1811), and by Father Jean Vabret, the Eudist missionary at Vincennes, and in December news of the forthcoming arrival of Sister Benedicta Parsons¹⁰ and Sister Mary Margaret Cully from Saint Joseph's Valley reached the Bishop.¹¹

The Sisters left Emmitsburg in December, 1837, and reached Vincennes during Bishop Bruté's absence in the South in search of health. His plans provided that Sister Benedicta from Emmitsburg would be the Superior and that for the two Nazareth Sisters the black cap and habit of Mother Seton's Community would replace their own. Bishop Bruté would like to have seen Nazareth and Emmitsburg united.¹² He did not return to Vincennes until April when he found that the transfer of the two Kentucky Sisters to the Emmitsburg Congregation was neither a prudent nor a workable arrangement. He therefore facilitated the return of the two self-sacrificing Sisters to Nazareth.

The small and ruinous quarters they had occupied had passed into the Bishop's hands for a thousand dollars on September 28, 1837. He now exchanged this location in May, 1838, for the very desirable half block on Church Street from Second to Third opposite the Cathedral, valued at \$3,800.¹³ Here under the name of Saint Mary's Female School, "the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's," as the Emmitsburg Sisters were called, opened a boarding and day school and free schools for both girls and boys, which soon had eighty pupils with forty in the academy. Four Sisters eventually made up the faculty, and the curriculum was modeled on the course of study at Saint Joseph's. This arrangement, while satisfactory to the Bishop, was definitely only temporary on the part of the superiors in Maryland, who gave the Sisters to Vincennes only until such time as the Bishop could secure another Community on a permanent basis. Though he wished to open additional schools, in January, 1839, he received word from Emmitsburg that no Sisters from there

⁹ Godecker, *Simon Bruté de Rémur*, p. 320.

¹⁰ Sister Benedicta volunteered for the Vincennes mission. She belonged to an old Maryland family. As they had early lost their parents, the children were reared by relatives, and though one brother became a priest, another who had already emigrated to Terre Haute with his family, lived and died a Protestant. This was Dr. Thomas Parsons, one of the city's early physicians, and his son, the nephew of Sister Benedicta, was the late President William W. Parsons of Indiana State Teachers College of Terre Haute.

¹¹ Godecker, *Simon Bruté de Rémur*, p. 335.

¹² Bruté-Seton Correspondence, p. 408.

¹³ Deed Records of Knox County, Indiana.

would be forthcoming except for Vincennes.¹⁴ He had already thought of trying to find Sisters in Europe. While in Lyons in 1836 he had seen the Sisters of Saint Joseph setting out for Saint Louis, and he had later contemplated applying for the Sacred Heart nuns, who had been established since 1818 in the Saint Louis diocese.

A second trip to France was becoming a necessity. Besides a Community of Sisters, other interests in Europe demanded the Bishop's attention. Young Auguste Bessonies, who had proffered his services at Issy in 1836¹⁵ for the Vincennes mission, Bishop Bruté had directed to finish his theology in Paris at Saint Sulpice, promising that in three years he would send for him and some others. These earnest and devoted young men must now be gathered together. German-speaking priests were another urgent need owing to the rapid influx of German Catholic immigrants into Indiana. Funds and material assistance of all sorts were an additional pressing and general need. The Bishop had however now only a few months to live. Father de la Hailandière must therefore make the long voyage in his place.

Bishop Bruté was now dying. His once rugged constitution had been undermined by the hardships of the Vincennes mission. A severe cold contracted from exposure to a violent storm of wind and rain on the outside of the stage, in March, 1837, while en route to the Third Council of Baltimore, had developed into the dread disease long known as consumption, against which the pioneer physicians were so helpless. With the menace of declining strength urging him to provide for the future of religion in his diocese, the saintly Bishop begged again and again in his voluminous correspondence with his brother prelates for the coadjutor whose appointment was now his chief concern.

He felt and knew with the unerring certainty of the trained physician that his span of life was narrowing from day to day. For his successor, his Vicar General was not however his first choice despite the recommendation of the Bishop of Rennes, owing probably to de la Hailandière's poor command of English and to certain defects of personality which became apparent later on. Bishop Bruté preferred instead Father Nicholas Petit, the Jesuit missionary from Saint Mary's College, Kentucky, whose services he valued so highly, but Father Petit was absolutely refused him by the order to which he belonged.¹⁶

After receiving his instructions the Vicar General left Vincennes in the autumn of 1838. He spent the pleasant winter months in New Orleans and sailed for Europe in the spring landing in Liverpool after a stormy voyage. He went straight to Alsace, and in April, 1839, was in Strasbourg and Haguenau, cordially received and entertained by the hospitable Picquet family, founders of the colony at Sainte Marie, Jasper County, Illinois, on the Embarras River, where a group of devout Alsatian Catholics had been located since 1837. This settlement was one of those interesting attempts at founding a Utopia in the United States which

¹⁴ To Msgr. Bruté, April 19, 1839. Notre Dame University Archives. Hereafter cited as N.D.U.A.

¹⁵ Alerding, *Diocese of Vincennes*, p. 486.

¹⁶ Godecker, *Simon Bruté de Rémur*, p. 336.

were not uncommon at the time. The unsettled political situation and still more the disappointment and restlessness produced in Catholic circles by the defection of Lamennais and the failure of the early efforts of Lacordaire and Montalembert had led members of the prominent and ardent Catholic family of the Picquets of Strasbourg to look for a home across the sea where they might plant a colony to be developed in accord with the centuries-old principles of Christian democracy. A chance acquaintance with James Fenimore Cooper's novels lent to one of the daughters of the family turned their attention to the New World.¹⁷ The *Colonie des Frères* was founded in Strasbourg in 1835, by Jacques Picquet, Joseph Picquet, Sr., Charles Hoffmann, and Joseph Schifferstein; and Joseph Picquet, *fils*, then a youth of nineteen, was sent to report upon the prospects of the new land in America. In 1837 he returned to Europe and came back with a group of Catholic Alsatian families and young people and invested in 13,000 acres of prairie and woodland in southern Illinois for a colony which they called Sainte Marie. Both Bishop Bruté and Father de la Hailandière had made their acquaintance and visited their settlement.

The Bishop of Strasbourg supported the Abbé de la Hailandière's request for help, and he secured a number of German-speaking clerics and candidates for the priesthood, among them Francis Fischer, Roman Weinzoepflen, Alphonse Munschina, Joseph Hamion, and Martin Stahl. In Strasbourg, too, he secured Sisters from the Community of Sisters of Divine Providence established since 1783 at Ribeauville in the same diocese by two Alsatian priests, Fathers Hurstel and Kremp, and modeled on the similar congregation of the Venerable Jean Martin Moye in Lorraine.¹⁸ Of this Community the Reverend Ignatius Mertian, uncle of Joseph Picquet, *fils*, was business manager, and an arrangement was concluded with him for the Sisters to send a colony to America with the group of priests and seminarians who were to return with Father de la Hailandière during the ensuing summer. It must have been at this time that Abbé de la Hailandière pledged himself to locate the colony of missionary Sisters at Sainte Marie, Illinois. With this understanding later when the Sisters of Ribeauville were unable to fulfill their engagements, Father Mertian did not withdraw the generous financial donation which he had promised for the foundation, but agreed to give the twenty-five thousand francs¹⁹ to defray the expense of founding another order of Sisters in the Picquet colony at Sainte Marie.

Priests and an order of Sisters to labor at Vincennes were not, however, the sum total of Abbé de la Hailandière's acquisitions in Alsace. He began also to seek for individual recruits. One notable vocation he fostered for the sisterhood. Mlle. Josephine Yvonne Pardeillan, daughter of a prosperous lawyer at Saverne, whom reverses of fortune had induced to become a governess in a count's family in Baden, had eventually entered

¹⁷ See Appendix I.

¹⁸ A. G. Foucault, *The Venerable J. M. Moye*, tr. by a Sister of Divine Providence (Melbourne, Ky., 1931), p. 92.

¹⁹ Clémentine de la Corbinière, *An Apostolic Woman*, trans. by a Sister of Providence (Catholic Publication Society, New York, 1882), p. 80. Hereafter cited as *An Apostolic Woman*.

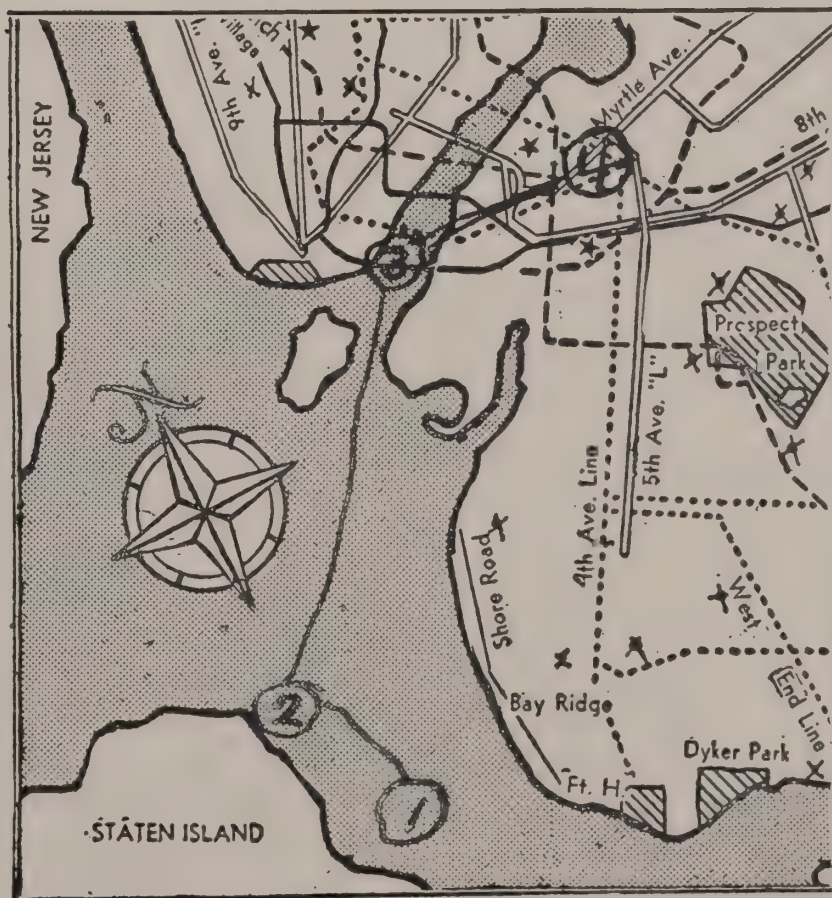


Drawn by Sister Camille, from data by Sister Mary Borromeo

FRENCH CRADLELAND OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE
The Old Provinces of Brittany and Maine.

LANDING IN NEW YORK

1. The *Cincinnati* at anchor in New York Bay, September 4, 1840.
2. Dr. Doane's Quarantine Station to which the Sisters went in a rowboat, September 5.
3. The steamboat route up the Bay to the end of the New York Landing at Battery Park.
4. Route to the Parmentier home in Brooklyn.



Route traced by Thomas F. Meehan



From Oil Portrait at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods

JEAN-BAPTISTE BOUVIER
1783-1854

Bishop of Le Mans, France, 1834-1854

"Saint Mary-of-the-Woods owes to him its very existence
and preservation."

MOTHER THEODORE

the commercial establishment of Joseph Picquet in Strasbourg, where she was highly esteemed and loved. Missionary life across the sea responded to her long cherished desires, and she entered as a postulant into the Community of the Sisters of Ribeauville with the purpose of accompanying them to America.

Just at this juncture in May, 1839, the bulls came from Rome appointing Abbé de la Hailandière, Bishop of Axierne *in partibus*, and coadjutor at last to the see of Vincennes. This caused a change in his plans. His original intention included a voyage to England and Ireland, though this was afterwards given up.²⁰ He now determined to remain in France for his consecration and to send on ahead to America the group he had assembled. He had counted upon the faith and zeal of his native Brittany for recruits for his mission, and he was not disappointed. His cousin, the Reverend Louis Ducoudray, joined him there and Abbé Augustin Martin, chaplain of the Royal College of Rennes, also the young clerics, Hippolyte DuPontavice, Ernest Audran and his brother Edward, John Guéguen, John B. Chassé, and others, all names to conjure with in the later history of Catholic Indiana. Father Martin was placed in charge of the party to sail on August 2, 1839. With them traveled also the faithful serving maids, Jeanne Février and Angelique Nielle, whose services Father de la Hailandière was fortunate enough to secure for his household.

In the meantime, from his friend Abbé Cardonnet, chaplain at Lorette, near Saint-Servan in Brittany, the country home of the ancient and distinguished family of Le Fer de la Motte, Bishop de la Hailandière had learned of another recruit, a beautiful, devout, and well educated young French girl, whose disinterested zeal was turning all her aspirations toward the missions. The family Le Fer de la Motte was originally from the center of France near Blois where during the Hundred Years War they commanded the archers of the Dukes of Orleans. They had settled in Brittany early in the fifteenth century and distinguished themselves in the wars of France. Under Louis XV the Le Fers and two other families as privateers made three thousand captures of ships on sea in ten years, some of powerful English war frigates. Traditionally strict in their devotion to the Royalist cause, two members of the family had been guillotined at Rennes during the Revolution, and an ancestor was among the martyrs of Quiberon, when sixteen hundred *émigrés* landed from an English fleet in June, 1795, in an attempt to rouse the Bretons and Vendéans against the Convention and were shot after surrendering by order of General Hoche. In the heart of Irma Le Fer de la Motte burned the courage of generations of brave sea rovers. Bertrand Le Fer was the first European to enter Tunis, then a nest of Turkish pirates, and another Le Fer commanded a frigate under Duguay-Trouin when that famous Breton naval commander captured Rio de Janeiro during the wars of Louis XIV in 1711 and levied a heavy tribute.

Before the missionary party had sailed from the port of Havre, news was received of the death of Bishop Bruté. The saintly prelate had expired five weeks earlier in Vincennes, June 24, 1839, still in ignorance of the appointment of his successor. The second Bishop of Vincennes, as

²⁰ Mgr. Bruté, 28 février, 1839. N.D.U.A.

Father de la Hailandière had now become, was consecrated in Paris on August 18, 1839, by the celebrated Bourbon Count-Bishop of Nancy and Toul, and Primate of Lorraine, Mgr. Charles de Forbin-Janson, who when later exiled by the French government made an extensive tour of America and visited Vincennes. As Bishop, Mgr. de la Hailandière's zeal for the mission of Vincennes was redoubled. He secured the promise of a colony of Brothers from Abbé Moreau's newly established Congregation of Holy Cross at Le Mans, and a group of Eudists from Rennes for Saint Gabriel's College in Vincennes.

Irma Le Fer heard the Bishop when he visited at her home, again at church, and in the homes of friends.

I have just been to hear Bishop de la Hailandière. He preached nothing but America. It was a conversation rather than a sermon. On leaving the church I went to Madame B—————'s, where I again saw him and Abbé Cardonnet. His pressing exhortations to go to America were no mere jests, and I did not laugh while listening to them. An hour later I saw these two gentlemen in the garden, and I went up to them. They were talking of me. O God, what a moment! What! to leave all that I love and so suddenly? How shall I ask my father? How speak of it to my mother? And he wishes me to accompany him in three months. The Abbé Martin and twenty priests are going with him. . . . I am happy here, perfectly happy, and it is for God only I would abandon my happiness in France. God! — He is worthy of some tears and heartbreakings.²¹

This was in April, and the colony of Sisters and clerics were to leave in July. To gain time to make her final decision, also to test her resolution to part from her loving and beloved family, Irma visited for some weeks in the Hailandière family, old friends, at the Château of Lanrigan, near Combourg. Finally resolved, she came home in June to Saint-Servan to inform her parents, to seek their consent, and make her final preparations to join the Alsatian Sisters as a lay auxiliary and sail for America in July. Suddenly, however, word was received that the Sisters of Ribeauville had withdrawn. Irma's departure was therefore necessarily cancelled, and the Bishop's colony left without her. Included in this reversal of plans was Mlle. Pardeillan, the young woman from Strasbourg who had spent some months as a postulant at Ribeauville and had gone to pass her last weeks in France with her family.

The decision of the Ribeauville superiors was final and irrevocable. Bishop de la Hailandière therefore turned his attention to securing the services of another religious Community to replace the one he had lost. He had known of the work of Sister Theodore and her Sisters at Rennes, and to them at the motherhouse of Ruillé-sur-Loir he appealed. Unusual and unexpected as his request must have seemed, the Superior General, Mother Mary, did not refuse. She made one condition, however, for her consent, and one only, that the erstwhile Superior of Rennes, for several years located at the village of Soulaines near Angers, Sister Theodore, would consent to lead the missionary band. The matter would be considered and Sister Theodore approached. The final decision would be given at the time of the annual retreat in September for which the Sisters

²¹ *An Apostolic Woman*, pp. 72, 73.

would assemble in a short time at Ruillé. After his consecration in Paris on August 18, 1839, Bishop de la Hailandière returned to Ruillé to press his request.

The deciding voice in the final acceptance of the Indiana mission was, however, that of the learned and well known Bishop of Le Mans, Monseigneur John Baptist Bouvier, since 1831 ecclesiastical superior of the Sisters of Providence and the author of their Rule. He presided at the council meeting at Ruillé when the Vincennes project was discussed, and was entirely in favor of the enterprise. As to Sister Theodore, though she had never felt called to missionary life, after long prayer and reflection, seeing in her superior's wish the will of God, she yielded, induced by the words of the Rule which continually recurred to her, "The Sisters must be disposed to go to any part of the world."²² Mother Mary thereupon promised Bishop de la Hailandière to seek for volunteers for the mission and to send him a colony of Sisters the following summer, and Sister Theodore returned to her mission of Soulaines to prepare in quiet and prayer for the lifework to which the inexplicable designs of Divine Providence were calling her.

During this year the church which the little parish of Soulaines owed to Sister Theodore's influence with the local nobleman, M. Perrault de la Bertaudière, was rising from its foundations, erected entirely by the munificence of the donor. Only three Sisters made up the little establishment at Soulaines, two teachers, Sister Theodore, who was also superior, and Sister Saint Edmond, and Sister Olympiade, the cook. At Ruillé the group of foundresses were to be chosen and final preparations to be made. No definite number of Sisters had been agreed upon; Bishop de la Hailandière expected only four. That was the number which had been sent from Nazareth to Vincennes and also the number of Emmitsburg Sisters still there. Mother Mary finally decided to give, in addition to the Superior, two teachers, two novices, and a lay Sister, six in all. The Bishop kept Sister Theodore informed as to conditions in Indiana. The Community was to establish a motherhouse on the model of Ruillé, and he counted upon recruits from the mission for its development. He was very definite in his requests: a pharmacist, a musician, and two teachers of the ordinary branches taught in the schools of France.

The location of the prospective convent, then and later the subject of so much uneasiness and apprehension, was apparently already decided. Though he wrote to Sister Theodore in January, 1840, "Busy hands have begun work on the house in which you are to live," the deed by which Joseph Thralls relinquished his first purchase to the Bishop is dated four months later, May, 1840. The Sisters' accounts, written after their arrival in October of the same year, state that the house had been begun about a month previously, and a letter from the Bishop at Vincennes to Father Martin at Logansport, August 6, 1840, seems to confirm this statement:

Our house in Terre Haute is not yet begun, which I regret very much, but what can I do? I think, however, that they will begin in less than a month.

²² Her decision was taken on August 24, 1839, Saint Bartholomew's Day, an anniversary of such moment in her life that she kept it in faithful remembrance as long as she lived.

All the materials are ready. Our Sisters—they do not say how many, I suppose four—are leaving at the end of the present month. Three Brothers are coming also. Pray for both groups and take good care of your little novice.²³ Here the library is finished. The outside looks well, but the interior has not yet followed the plan. . . . the sacristy will be finished today.²⁴

To Sister Theodore he wrote:

The chapel which was to have been yours has burnt down. It is very unfortunate. You will not be without one however. Another is being begun; a priest is seeing to everything there for you.²⁵

"The priests of the diocese had been consulted as to the location for the Sisters," wrote Mother Cecilia. "Some said, 'Saint Peter's,' others 'Saint Mary's'." ²⁶ No one seemed to think of Terre Haute, yet Bishop Bruté in 1838 had written to his sister-in-law at Rennes, "Here at Terre Haute, a new city which advances more rapidly than Vincennes, they wish to have the first Sisters." ²⁷

As soon as he had been assured of the coming of the Emmitsburg Sisters to Vincennes in 1837, Bishop Bruté's zeal had begun to reach out with projects of their spreading to other localities in his needy diocese. At first he thought of locating them at Black Oak Ridge or Saint Peter's, Father Lalumiere's charge in Daviess County, to replace the Nazareth mission founded by Sister Angela Spink and Sister Ellen O'Connell in 1832, which lasted only a year, but later his attention and desires concentrated on Terre Haute. Writing from Vincennes in July, 1837, he gives details:

My friends urge me to call the Sisters to Terre Haute where I know . . . they would be immediately welcome and surprised by numerous boarders, say more than twenty-five to begin. Terre Haute is a pleasing new town wholly American, that is, Protestant with very few Catholics and a priest who says Mass on only one of three Sundays, as he has two other chapels in the country for the other Sundays; all extremely friendly, or as you say it, liberal. My friends are so eager and so sanguine that they tell me our Catholic congregation will soon increase and that I may see it grow faster by the presence of the Sisters. It is true, but I would regret too much to see our dear Sisters deprived of Mass and the presence of a priest where they are.²⁸

In September he asked of the Sisters at Vincennes "further study of His will here for having other schools, e.g., in our thriving Terre Haute, etc." Again in December he writes of "a second school in this destitute diocese, say in Terre Haute." ²⁹ By this time the Bishop had for the Emmitsburg Sisterhood three candidates of whom he felt proud and proposed to offer them in exchange for additional Sisters. From New Orleans, where the Bishop spent some months in search of health and where Father Buteux was collecting for his brick church in Terre Haute, the Bishop wrote to request Sister Benedicta to visit Terre Haute and see what

²³ Later Sister Philomene Doyle.

²⁴ S. M. W. A.

²⁵ 27 mars, 1840. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ Both in Daviess County, Indiana. MS. Life of Mother Theodore. S.M.W.A.

²⁷ Copy in S.M.W.A.

²⁸ Bruté-Seton Correspondence, p. 484.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 492, 500.

prospects she could find there for a school in accordance with his wish to establish Sisters in the principal towns of his diocese. Everything appeared favorable, and Sister Benedicta's brother, Mr. Thomas Parsons, encouraged the enterprise.³⁰ His little seven-year-old daughter, a Protestant, was one of the first boarding pupils received at Vincennes, where she died after baptism by Bishop Bruté.

His plans extended also to schools in Chicago and Evansville, but Terre Haute was evidently his first choice for additional Sisters. A persistent tradition at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods ascribes the choice of their convent home to the revered Bruté. "You will see what great things will be done here," wrote Sister Maurice as a legend to one of her drawings of the little motherhouse, attributing the prophecy to Bishop Bruté. He it was who named the locality Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, all in ignorance that another Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in the old province of Maine had been the home of the Founder of the Sisters of Providence, Father Dujarié. The Sisters later saw in this little coincidence a tiny ray of heavenly encouragement in their fight against failure and starvation. The Queen of Heaven had already begun her reign in advance of their coming.

On his return from Europe, November 14, 1839,³¹ Bishop de la Hailandière had been received in Vincennes with an "élan de joie," which he had not thought possible. He was welcomed by Catholics and Protestants alike, and verses were addressed to him in Latin, French, and English. He continued to keep in touch with Sister Theodore and gave details about the preparations for the voyage from Ruillé to Vincennes. "If notified in time, I will send some one to direct the voyage [from New York]. It is essential to come in time to find shelter before winter, that is, choose the place to build your house and erect enough of it to live in for the winter. . . . I am buying a location for the Community but reluctantly, as I would rather have the Sisters choose for themselves."³² "The Protestant College has failed," he wrote, "and the Catholics have bought it, though as yet it is not paid for, but how many things have been done in five years! Here five years is a century."³³

The year of waiting was drawing to a close, and the foundresses selected from those who had volunteered by the Superior General and her council at Ruillé were notified to return to the motherhouse to make their final preparations for their departure, which was fixed for July 16, 1840. The Sisters named were: Sister Theodore, Superior; Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, Assistant; Sister Saint Dominique; and two novices, Sisters Marie Xavier and Saint Liguori. Eventually Sister Saint Dominique, who was destined for the onerous duty of visiting the sick, was considered by Sister Theodore incapacitated by poor health for this charge, and at her request Sister Basilide was substituted. Her one query, "Will we be separated from Ruillé?" answered in the negative, though not among the original volunteers, she agreed to join the band. The sixth member of the group was Sister Olympiade, still a novice, who had been with Mother Theodore

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

³¹ H. S. Cauthorn, *History of St. Francis Xavier Cathedral* (Vincennes, Indiana), p. 57.

³² 17 décembre, 1839. S. M. W. A.

³³ *Ibid.*

as cook at Soulaines. Mother Mary's intention was to have her return to her family as her vocation seemed doubtful, but Bishop Bouvier to whom she appealed, advised Sister Theodore to take her to America. The final roster of the missionaries then, the "First Six" honored for over a hundred years in every convent of the Sisters of Providence was: Sister Theodore, Anne Thérèse Guérin, Foundress and Superior General; Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer; Sister Basilide; the two novices, Sister Mary Xavier and Sister Saint Liguori; and Sister Olympiade. Sister Theodore also expected that Mlle. Irma Le Fer de la Motte, now a postulant at Ruillé, would also form one of the missionary colony.

Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, Victoire Gagé, was a native of Le Mans, the oldest of the group, and had been for some years on mission at Fougères in Brittany when she volunteered for the Indiana mission in the summer of 1839. Quiet and demure, deeply prayerful and discreet, she was local superior for years at Vincennes and Fort Wayne, and spent her last years in retirement at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, dying suddenly in 1874. Much younger was Sister Basilide, Josephine Seneschal, a gay, capable, affectionate, and intelligent Frenchwoman twenty-eight years of age, from Chateaudun. She learned English with unusual quickness and proved an efficient and devoted teacher from the first years at the Academy. During Mother Theodore's last years she was superior at Madison, and after the Foundress's death spent many years at the motherhouse in the onerous and responsible position of *econome* till her death in 1878. Sister Olympiade, Thérèse Boyer, a native of Orleans, was thirty-four. She was an excellent cook and skilled in all sorts of household work and in the care of the sick, having had some hospital work before entering the novitiate at Ruillé. She proved to be a distinct asset to the Community. With further training from Mother Theodore she was able to act as pharmacist and sick nurse at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and was laundress and clotheskeeper, rendering all sorts of valuable service for many years till incapacitated by infirmities. She lived to extreme old age, dying in 1893.

Of the two novices, Sister Saint Liguori, Louise Tiercin, who was also called Sister Mary Liguori, was the dearly loved daughter of a merchant at Fougères. She early showed such unusual spiritual and intellectual calibre that the little Community began to look to her for leadership in the contingency of Mother Theodore's death or removal. Though only twenty-two when she came to America, she was soon entrusted with responsibilities which developed her judgment and her spiritual capabilities in a surprising manner. She founded the missions at Saint Francisville and Saint Peter's and went through the difficult early years in Madison till her health, at first undermined at Saint Peter's and shattered by later hardships and privations, yielded at last to tuberculosis. She died in 1847 at the early age of twenty-eight years, after only six years in America. Her companion novice, Sister Mary Xavier, Françoise Lerée, long known in the Community as Sister Mary, though several years older than Sister Saint Liguori, was one of the last of the original group to die. An accomplished seamstress, she gave efficient and constant service for many years in the lingerie at Providence till her death in 1897.

Sister Theodore left Soulaines to return to Ruillé in June. The other

members of the group arrived about the same time except Sister Olympiade, who was to join them en route. Mother Mary was already absent visiting the missions, and the Sisters proceeded with their preparations without her. Farewell visits to their relatives took up part of the last days, and a private retreat was undertaken by those of the group who could be spared from the general final business arrangements. A last letter in July from Mother Mary, informing Sister Theodore that she would not be at Ruillé to bid them adieu, revealed to the harassed Foundress that, as she had dreaded and feared, she had incurred her stern Superior's displeasure, presumably by her frankness in regard to Sister Dominique's incapacity and by receiving Sister Olympiade on Bishop Bouvier's advice after Mother Mary had rejected her. Writing to Mother Mary at Chartres-sur-Loir, some thirty miles away, where she remained till after the Indiana missionaries had departed, Sister Saint Vincent said her last adieux to their loved Mother:

Arrived at Mayenne I parted from Sister Saint Dominique, who remained there as had been decided. Continuing on to Le Mans, I met Sister Theodore, and the same day we came to Ruillé together. A few days later, about the first of July, we returned to Le Mans to pay a visit to the Bishop, who received us very cordially and blessed us. I returned to Ruillé without seeing my family, and on the fourth I began my retreat. Impossible however to devote myself to it as I would have wished, because of the host of distractions incident upon our approaching voyage, the trouble and care of our trunks, which I had to share with Sister Theodore, and still more because of the sorrow that she feels for having displeased you.³⁴

Sister Theodore's loving heart was torn with anguish at leaving all she held dear, her Sisters in religion, Ruillé, the cradle of her religious life, and France her country. A grievous disappointment had also awaited her at Ruillé. Irma Le Fer de la Motte, whom Sister Theodore had named Sister Saint Francis Xavier and who at Bishop de la Hailandière's advice had entered the novitiate of the Sisters of Providence to prepare to leave for America with the missionary band, was now detained in France. Mother Mary's decision on this point was positive and irrevocable. To her mother, Irma wrote:

I have had the pleasure of again seeing my dear Sister Theodore. I cannot tell you what feelings agitated us. We were very reasonable, however, hoping to see each other again next year. I must strengthen myself and submit with patience. Our Mother Mary has seen you, I trust, and has told you of the approaching departure of our Sisters. My heart follows these good Sisters over the waves to their dear mission of Vincennes.³⁵

At nine o'clock at night on July 12, Sister Theodore and the two novices left Ruillé for Le Mans arriving there at dawn, and in the house of the Sisters of Providence were joined by Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer and Sister Basilide, who had been spending a few days with their families. Four days later, on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Canon Lottin, Bishop Bouvier's secretary and rector of the Cathedral, celebrated Mass for them at four o'clock and gave them Holy Communion before they left for Havre. An all-day coach ride would bring them to Lisieux, where

³⁴ 23 juillet, 1840. S.M.W.A.

³⁵ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 136.

they were to spend the night. Almost straight north along one of the famous sunken roads of France they drove, crossing the Sarthe River at the old gray town of Alençon, passing through thick woods and hedge-bordered fields, past towns of old stone and timber houses and Gothic towers. Poplar trees lined the old route. Through Séez with its celebrated Norman cathedral and Saint Pierre and Argentan, rich in medieval atmosphere, they traveled into the famous apple orchard region of Normandy. At eleven at night they reached Lisieux, since known all over the world as the home of the Little Flower of Jesus, where they found Sister Olympiade, who had been domiciled with her family since June, and the kind friends, M. and Mme. Marie from Soulaines, who were to accompany them to Havre.

Next morning they took the stage again. From Honfleur at the mouth of the Seine they crossed to Havre in a steamboat arriving in that harbor, congested by ships from every part of the world, to find that they were not expected and that no preparation had been made for their voyage. Of the two agents who were to arrange for their passage, one was ill and could not be seen, the other was in the country. Their friend from Soulaines, M. Marie, exerted himself however and located a merchant ship, the *Cincinnati*, in charge of Captain Barstow, sailing for New York on July 22, which seemed satisfactory, and upon which their passage was therefore engaged. They were taking the New York route. Bishop de la Hailandière had hoped that the missionary Sisters could leave France in the spring of 1840 and had urged this arrangement upon Sister Theodore in his letters to her at Soulaines. He had originally also preferred the New Orleans route, which was more desirable and inexpensive, as they could secure steamboat passage there direct to Terre Haute.

Sister Theodore now sought hospitality with the Ladies of Saint Thomas at Havre for her group of six, and after some delay they set sail on July 27 from that beloved France, which they expected never to see again in this life. They were the only cabin passengers and were to be served at the captain's table. A large room for their exclusive use afforded them privacy for their devotions, and they were assured of abstinence fare on Fridays and, according to the custom of the time, on Saturdays also. A last minute gift of three thousand francs from a Community friend, the Countess de Marescot, added appreciably to their slender resources. Without this timely donation they would not have had sufficient funds for their voyage.⁸⁰

The crossing was long and painful. Seasickness prostrated almost all. Their ignorance of the English language baffled and disconcerted them, and Mother Theodore's severe illness made the voyage for her what she named it in her journal, "fifty days of penance." A motley group of steerage passengers made up the complement of fifty-eight persons on board. An ocean voyage in the old style sailing ships of a hundred years ago was certain to be long and filled with delays due to calms or contrary winds, and certain also to be a disagreeable if not painful experience

⁸⁰ Sister Mary Theodosia Mug, ed., *Journal and Letters of Mother Theodore Guérin* (Providence Press, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, 1937), p. 5. Hereafter cited as *J. and L.*

because of the crowded and poor accommodations of the period. Several of the Sisters had said goodbye to weeping relatives, and all were victims of the cruel nostalgia, which the French heart feels so keenly, as they slowly sailed out of the harbor of Havre and past Fort Francis I, the last spot in their native land upon which their eyes rested. Mother Theodore has left us a detailed history of the voyage in her incomparable journal, whose pages reveal in no uncertain colors, the courage, the resignation and submission, the deep love of God and of her religious Sisters which come out into brighter relief with each day of the sixteen years of her missionary career in America.

Prostrated by seasickness almost from the first, Mother Theodore later succumbed to an inflammatory fever, which brought her speedily to death's door. She felt that she could not recover, and the Sisters too feared that she would not survive the voyage. Nevertheless no day passed when she was able to hold her pen without an entry in her faithful journal. Robbed by the passport agent, they only escaped losing part of their baggage through the watchfulness of one of the passengers, probably the "good Breton," Thomas Brassier, who eventually followed them to Saint Mary's. Not a single person on board could speak both English and French. The crew and the captain were all Americans, the passengers German and French emigrants. After several days of complete prostration, the Sisters crept up on deck to find their ship far out upon the great expanse of the ocean, only water and sky in sight. Sister Basilide stood the voyage better than anyone else and spent her days and nights in service to the other members of the group. Only by signs could they obtain what they needed, though kind Captain Barstow lost no opportunity within his power to contribute to their comfort.

The high white coast of England appeared on their right on their third day out and next day the green shores of Ireland. "On the fourth day the sea was as calm as the River Loir. . . . I was surprised to find the ocean so thickly inhabited. This gave to the sea an appearance of grandeur and life. Eighteen ships were counted that day, and later, as many as twenty-five or thirty were in sight on the horizon." On this same day they were served for the first time at the captain's table, where they were embarrassed by the absence of table napkins and spoons. "Three stowaways, robbers who had escaped from the French prisons and who pressed by hunger had been prowling about the lower quarters of the ship at night in search of food, had given themselves up and were brought up from the hold. The coolness and kindness of the captain were admirable. Not content with treating them well, two days later he paid their passage on an English vessel which was going to Havre. . . . The following days there was a great calm. The sea was like a vast plain covered with motionless ships, which like our own were awaiting the wind. . . ."

Ocean steamships had been introduced the previous year and though much faster and more commodious were by no means numerous as yet and were more expensive than the sailing vessels. Sister Theodore's journal continues:

On the fifth of August the wind blew violently from the northeast. In the morning the sea was already troubled, but in the evening, the winds increasing

constantly, the waves rose up in a fearful manner and dashed with terrible noise against the sides of the vessel. . . . Everyone had disappeared from the deck but ourselves. Finally, we also left this imposing yet terrible spectacle. . . . We went to bed but not to sleep. The hurricane continued with the same fury in the midst of absolute darkness. The sea lashed our poor ship fearfully; at every instant we thought it would sink. . . . At last this night, so fearfully long, passed away and brought us to the morning of the sixth of August. But the feast of the Transfiguration was not to lead us to Thabor, for the tempest continued and did not cease till evening. It was extremely painful to be ill on an American ship, which was lacking in everything, even good water. These privations, however, were not what caused me the most pain. . . . What did affect me was the deep regret my poor companions would have suffered had they been obliged to confide my mortal remains to the waves. God was satisfied with our resignation. Five days later I was better. . . . At length the storm ceased, and the greatest calm ensued. During the tempest we had made good headway. . . .

Our situation did not change much from day to day. We said our prayers in common and made our spiritual reading. Whenever I was able to be up, we all passed our days on deck. The Sisters sewed, studied, walked up and down the captain's room. We were mistresses of everything around us, and wherever we installed ourselves, no one intruded. I passed my days contemplating the sea, the clouds, the vessels, the fish. The aspect of the sky is much more diversified on sea than on land. Oftentimes the sea was calm like an immense mirror upon which the pure sky was very exactly reflected. . . .

From the sixth I had been deprived of the pleasure of contemplating these beauties, but on the thirteenth my good Sisters helped me up to the bridge. . . . Finally we came to the fifteenth of August, the day of joy and happiness for all true children of Mary. We were all somewhat depressed at being deprived of the happiness of receiving the Sacraments on that day. . . . But we made the sacrifice of everything. . . .

The sixteenth was remarkable for two incidents. . . . the first was a fire caused by the carelessness of a sailor who had let the contents of his pipe fall on his bed. . . . The second event was more tragic. The billows were covered with blood, and death had captured another victim. Do not be alarmed. It was only a fish that had been caught by the harpoon, a porpoise so large that six of our vigorous sailors were hardly able to drag it aboard. . . .

On the seventeenth we had rough weather again, but we were now somewhat inured to it and were not frightened. . . . Then came a good aft wind. All our sails were out, and we advanced at the rate of eight knots an hour. But the rolling was so great that we were thrown and bruised in our beds and were obliged to leave them and spread our little mattresses upon the floor. The vessel rolled about like a nut on the sea. . . . Our dear plump Sister Liguori fell against me with all her weight. I thought I was killed. Four times we lighted the candle, but it could not be kept in place. Never did we laugh so heartily as that evening. The next morning the sport continued, the same rolling. The Sisters went up for breakfast . . . but scarcely were they at table when suddenly the rocking became so violent that it upset the plates and dishes and made a marmalade of everything. Poor Sister Liguori, thrown down by the shock, fell under the table. Happily they were alone. . . .

This rocking and rolling brought us to the banks of Newfoundland, however, where we arrived on the twenty-second, twenty-six days after our departure from Havre. All day there was a pleasant aft wind, so that we passed the banks in twenty-four hours. . . .

The next day was very calm, but on the twenty-fourth good Saint Bartholomew sent us a great storm for the anniversary of the final decision of our de-

parture for America. Our sufferings now were greater than ever. Poor Sister Saint Vincent could bear up no longer. She was quite sick during the entire crossing, but always pious and resigned as she is wont to be. She edified us very much by the simplicity of her faith and indeed by all the virtues of a good religious.

On the thirtieth we saw three whales together. They were near enough for us to examine them. . . . This day was also the fifth Sunday that we passed on the ocean. The weather was serene and the sea as smooth as a mirror. . . . The thirty-first was Monday. A furious storm arose. Almost all our sails were furled. One was nearly carried off notwithstanding the efforts of the whole crew. Several were torn asunder. The masts were bent like reeds. . . . Nothing was heard on board but screams and lamentations. . . . While all this was happening below, we were alone on the upper deck at our usual places contemplating all that surrounded us, calm and resigned to whatever the Lord might ordain.

The morning of the third day was more calm. We had left the ocean and entered the bay leading to New York. . . . After supper that evening we saw for the last time the sun sinking into the waves. This spectacle, as I said before, is always admirable; indeed, ravishing. . . .

At dawn the next day the first object that met our eyes was land. . . . Having said our prayers with the greatest union of spirit, we went on deck and saw quite distinctly the land toward which we had been sailing for forty days.³⁷

America, the goal of their desires and their prayers, the land of promise to so many eager hearts before and since, lay before them, beautiful and smiling in the warm, bright sunshine of the September morning.

³⁷ *J. and L.*, pp. 6-22.

CHAPTER IV

ON AMERICAN SOIL

"My Sisters, if we must die, let us die and say nothing."

MOTHER THEODORE

THE beauty of New York bay, the host of ships of all kinds crowding the harbor, the elegance of the country houses on the shore, the spacious and roomy character of the landscape, surprised and interested the weary travelers. The entrance to New York is according to general opinion the most beautiful sight it is possible to behold,¹ wrote the Foundress.

We dropped anchor in the roadstead last evening about five o'clock. There were very beautiful hills on both sides covered with magnificent houses, white as milk. Nearly all have colonnades in front which support some very fine peristyles. These lovely houses are all surrounded by gardens and trees, richly green and somewhat like our poplars, but in very full foliage. The aspect of the country is as fresh and smiling as France is in June.²

Ignorant of the language, alone, and disconsolate, the Sisters appreciated at double value the kind attentions of the quarantine officer, Dr. Sidney A. Doane, who during his medical studies in Paris had become acquainted with the religious in charge of the hospitals there and had learned to reverence them and value their work. He belonged to an old New York family which had given a Protestant Episcopal Bishop to Albany and the Catholic convert, a Vicar General and Monsignor, Dr. Doane's brother, to the diocese of Newark, New Jersey.³ This kind physician greeted the Sisters most cordially in French and encouraged them in their isolation and loneliness. Returning a little later to the ship, he brought them from his own garden a basket of delicious fruit, so grateful to the poor foreigners distressed from forty days of seasickness and American cooking. Nor did his goodness stop there. He informed Bishop Dubois of the six French religious on board the *Cincinnati* and delivered Mother Theodore's letter to him. No messenger appeared nor a word from Bishop de la Hailandière. Next day, Saturday, the Vicar General, Very Reverend Felix Varela, came out in a rowboat to conduct them to shore and confide them to the generous hospitality of Madame Sylvie Parmentier and her family in Brooklyn.

Sylvie Marie Parmentier, whose name is still honored in that great city, was born at Louvain in Belgium, April 6, 1793, and married her distant relative André Parmentier. They belonged to a family famous in France as horticulturists, and Le Nôtre is said to have modeled Louis XIV's famous *parc de Versailles* upon the beautiful and spacious gardens at Enghien which they had developed. One of the Parmentiers introduced

¹ *J. and L.*, p. 22.

² A Mère Marie, 5 septembre, 1840. S. M. W. A.

³ Thomas F. Meehan, "A Century Ago," *America*, vol. 57, no. 5, May 8, 1937, p. 114.

the potato into France, originally named for them *parmentière*.⁴ André Parmentier brought his family to Brooklyn in 1824 and invested in a twenty-five acre site now in the center of the city, which soon became well known as the Parmentier Horticultural Garden. He cultivated the grape and the peach with marked success and introduced many varieties of trees and plants into the United States. On his death in 1830 Madame Parmentier continued the business for some time but eventually sold it and built the home on Bridge Street with a small but exquisite garden in the rear.⁵ Tablets to the memory of André Parmentier and his daughter Adèle Parmentier Bayer, "the Angel of the Navy Yard," were erected in Brooklyn in 1925. Madame Parmentier died in 1882. Her younger daughter Rosine lived to an advanced age in Brooklyn continuing the charitable traditions of the family.

Mother Cecilia tells the story of the journey from the *Cincinnati* to the Parmentier mansion on Long Island. Transferring from the large sailing vessel to a tiny sailboat was no small ordeal:

The sea happened to be rough, and it was difficult and even dangerous to go down from the vessel into the boat below. The descent was made by a rope ladder under which a sailor stood to receive in his arms each one as she came down. The motion of the vessel and of the boat was continual, both rolling with the waves that passed under them. The rope ladder swung back and forth, and the little boat was unsteady under it, so that to pass from the end of the ladder was a step extremely hazardous and which if missed might result in the accident of falling into the sea never to rise.

The appearance of danger roused Sister Theodore, who could in a moment nerve herself and be ready to go through any peril or perform any arduous task. She hastily stepped forward and went down with so much courage and self-possession that the others followed with less fear.⁶

Mother Theodore in her Journal says that "the sea was frightful."

No matter. We had to go. . . . I whispered to the Sisters, "Come, if we have to die, let us die and say nothing." With these words, I descended first by the rope ladder without experiencing the least uneasiness; the others followed, none showing fear except poor Sister Liguori who was pale and trembling as though she were sure of meeting death in the waters.⁷

The little boat carried them to the Quarantine Station in the harbor of New York. Here kind Dr. Doane met them again and took them to his house where a good fire dried their garments drenched with the waves and the rain. In a few moments the harbor steamboat arrived to take them up the Bay to the New York and Brooklyn ferry dock, a half hour's ride. Here they transferred to the ferryboat in which they crossed the East River to Brooklyn. There at her handsome and spacious home, 342 Bridge Street, Madame Parmentier received and entertained many of the missionaries who passed through New York for years.⁸ It was Saturday, September 5, 1840.

⁴ Sister Mary James Lowery, S.S.J., *Model Lay Activity: The Brooklyn Parmentier Family*, Fordham University Dissertation (1940), pp. 2, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter II.

⁶ Mother M. Cecilia's MS. Life of Mother Theodore.

⁷ *J. and L.*, p. 27.

⁸ Sr. M. James Lowery, *Model Lay Activity*, p. 21.

The Sisters had not heard Mass nor received the Sacraments since they left France six weeks before.

Reverend Father Varela came the next day after they landed to hear their confessions. He heard them in the parlor, of course, without confessional or surplice. To French Sisters who had never even heard of such a thing . . . they could not feel that they had satisfied the conditions of the Sacrament of Penance. But as they came to lead a missionary's life in the New World, it was well to have a taste as soon as they had put their foot on it, of the trials and privations they were to expect in a country where Catholicity was only beginning to be established. They had the happiness of receiving Holy Communion on the 8th of September, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, which was the third of their arrival and one of the memorable days of their emigration.⁹

This was the occasion of Mother Theodore's vow to devote herself henceforth to the missions.

While shedding an abundance of tears we renewed the consecration of ourselves to God for the mission to which He had deigned to call us. How sweet for us the moment when we had the happiness of uniting ourselves to Our Lord in the Holy Sacrament after having been so long deprived of this inestimable benefit. The day was one of signal consolations. What happiness we tasted on that day! Not too dearly was it bought by fifty days of penance. Then I gave myself to the Lord to do and suffer all that He pleases in America where there is so much to do. What terrifies me is my extreme infirmity, my utter indigence in virtue. I feel keenly that to do any good here one must be entirely dependent on the spirit of God. If man mingles his own poor action with the work, all will be spoiled. Beg of the good God then . . . that He empty us of all that belongs to the old man in order to deign afterwards to make use of us for whatever He wishes, perhaps only to suffer, but no matter.¹⁰

Shining in grateful remembrance for over a century at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods are the names of Byerley and Parmentier, friends who remained for many years attached to the Sisters of Providence, rendering continual service and conferring repeated favors. Samuel Byerley was an English merchant, related to the Wedgwood family, a wholesale grocer established for several years in New York, whose family had been distinguished in the annals of Shakespeare's Warwickshire for many generations. A Protestant at the time of the Sisters' arrival in New York, he entered the Church only about a year later. He offered his services to Mother Theodore and was of untold assistance to the little group of foreign missionaries, arranging for their baggage to be passed without inspection, forwarding it afterward to their destination through reliable channels, and rendering a thousand services later to the defenseless little band. Providence was smoothing their pathway. At every turn friends appeared who vied with one another to serve them.

Nothing was opened aboard the *Cincinnati*, wrote Mr. Byerley to Madame Parmentier. The custom house officers were very obliging. Captain Barstow told me that Dr. Doane said he had visited the hospitals of Paris and had there witnessed the incomparable conduct of the Sisters, and that in his opinion it would bring a blessing on anyone who would render them the

⁹ Mother M. Cecilia's MS.

¹⁰ A Mère Saint Charles, 17 septembre, 1840. S. M. W. A.

least service. Consequently he would be mortified to receive any thanks for this attention.¹¹

The Parmentier family welcomed the Sisters with true Christian hospitality and surrounded them with kindness and charitable attention.

However, wrote Mother Theodore to the motherhouse in France, one very essential thing is wanting. I would like to pass over it in silence for fear of paining your hearts. There is no one here to meet us from Vincennes, no letter, no agent, and one must have money in the pocket to travel in America. They count here by dollars as we do by francs in France, and the value is not nearly the same. It is impossible to get to Indiana on what is left of the generosity of our friends. . . . We have learned for a certainty that there are Sisters of Charity at Vincennes.¹²

To their great distress, Bishop de la Hailandière continued entirely oblivious of their arrival and their painful situation without funds. His agreement with the Ruillé Superiors had stipulated that they would equip the Sisters, but their transportation would be at his expense. He at once asked that the ocean fare would be advanced by Ruillé, which was done, but here they were in America without any provision made for them, anxious and embarrassed as to their future movements. Upon deliberation they decided to seek out in Philadelphia Bishop de la Hailandière's agent to whom he had referred them.

Only five days were spent in New York at the residence of the hospitable Parmentiers. Already, however, the Sisters had begun to gather information as to the manners and customs, the educational prospects and requirements of the American people. They had learned with something of a shock that Bishop de la Hailandière had a colony of American Sisters of Charity at Vincennes, and from then on recurred to their minds the insistent query, "Why then the need of poor French religious, ignorant of the language and customs of the country?" Assisted, however, by the kind Parmentiers, they made careful inquiries concerning publishers and dealers in textbooks, maps, charts, and school supplies and availed themselves of every opportunity to gather needful information. They had known before leaving France that in America the scope and requirements of education were much more extended than in France. "People here are more exacting on the point of education than in France," wrote Bishop de la Hailandière early in 1840, "and consequently more things must be taught." The Sisters were surprised everywhere by the fondness of the Americans for music, which in France in boarding schools was generally taught by "masters."

Their greatest suffering and handicap all along their route westward was their ignorance of the language of the country. On shipboard and later they could only make their wants known by signs. Captain Barstow knew one French word, "oui." Mother Theodore and perhaps some of the others could read a little English. The Sisters of Charity in Philadelphia pronounced her accent "rather good," but she was past the age of ready assimilation of another tongue, and the thought of starting on a journey of twelve or fifteen hundred miles into the interior of the country

¹¹ *J. and L.*, p. 31.

¹² A Mère Marie, 7 septembre, 1840. S. M. W. A.

without a guide they all rejected as an impossibility. "We have written . . . to Monseigneur begging him to send for us if he still wishes our services."¹³

The extent and the handsome appearance of New York City and the elegance of the inhabitants and the carriages were a source of amazement to the Sisters. The large cities of the Atlantic seaboard compared favorably with those of Europe. New York, however, though the metropolis of the country, offered in 1840 a patchwork of buildings of different eras and materials. Ramshackle wooden shacks stood elbow to elbow on the principal thoroughfares with tall and imposing brick structures. Trade and finance centered on lower Broadway, a fashionable parade at certain hours, but perilous at night on account of its poor paving, dim and flickering gas lights, and shade from the border of Lombardy poplars. The fine qualities of the American people, their high regard for women, the number of men at church, and their respectful demeanor, the absence of class distinctions in dress, and the respect with which their religious habit was everywhere received and treated by people, almost all of whom were Protestants, surprised and touched the travelers. Saint Peter's Church in Barclay Street with its solid mahogany pews and the crystal brilliance of its white furnishings, the severe and sombre beauty of the city of New York, its fine brick sidewalks and stone paved crossings passed before their eyes like a mirage. Mother Theodore in her journal notes every detail with such care and accuracy that although she knew almost no names of localities owing to her ignorance of English, it is possible to follow and recognize their route even about Greater New York.

How mistaken we were in thinking we should find here people without civilization. In France we have no idea of the luxury of the houses, the courtesy and the fine appearance of the inhabitants. . . . They give a brilliant education here, offering a number of little things that the Americans greatly admire, notably drawing, painting, music, and various kinds of needlework, embroidery, etc.¹⁴

New York City was growing rapidly. The young and gifted Bishop Hughes had only a year before taken over the administration of the diocese which was slipping from the failing grasp of Bishop Dubois, the founder of Mount Saint Mary's at Emmitsburg, one of the earliest and most influential of the Sulpician group. Bishop Hughes had returned from Europe only a few months previously and was now involved in the momentous dispute over the school question, an attempt to secure public funds for the Catholic schools. This fight, toward which he bent all the influence of his great authority, lost in New York, was never successfully waged elsewhere and has had its repercussions even to the present day in the double taxation and the parochial system which have been the hardship and the glory of the American Church. Bishop Hughes it was who sent Father Varela, the Vicar General, to conduct the Sisters to Madame Parmentier's house. Her charity and her gracious hospitality were well known to the Bishops of New York. For many years it had been Bishop Dubois's custom to spend two days of every week with the Par-

¹³ A Mère Saint Charles, 17 septembre, 1840. S. M. W. A.

¹⁴ A Mère Marie, 7 septembre, 1840. S. M. W. A.

mentier family for the purpose of transacting the affairs of the growing Church of Long Island. His apartment, called the Bishop's Room, was kept for him in the house and was "preserved almost as he left it in 1839 up to the death of the last member of the family in 1908."¹⁵

The Sisters had been told at Havre that religious could not appear on the streets of America in their religious dress; nevertheless, they disembarked at New York in their religious habits without meeting anything but curious and respectful looks. "Everyone who saw us seemed thunder-struck or changed into a statue of salt like Lot's wife and stood still staring at us as if we were extraordinary beings."¹⁶ They called upon Bishop Hughes who counseled them, however, to dress as seculars when crossing the country.

One circumstance afflicted them greatly. Bishop Dubois insisted on their wearing secular dress as he feared indignities otherwise. No secular dress, however, could disguise them; everywhere they were recognized as nuns, and this very fact procured for them the opposite treatment to what had been anticipated, civility everywhere except upon only one occasion from people of the lowest class. To speak of it and describe in exaggerated terms the ludicrous figure they made rigged out in dress, shawl, and bonnet was for a while a theme of mirthful recreation.¹⁷

The Bishop had learned that the Reverend William Chartier, a Canadian priest who spoke both French and English, was traveling to Indiana, and he asked him to escort the Sisters. The New York *Catholic Register* of Thursday, September 10, 1840, carried on its first page a brief notice concerning the missionary band:

SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE

of Ruillé-sur-Loir

It is with feelings of sincere gratification that we have the pleasure of announcing the arrival of the *Cincinnati*, Capt. N. Barstow, on Friday 4th inst. after a passage of forty days with the following ladies of the order of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir in the diocese of Mons [*sic*] France; Sister Theodore, Superior; Sisters Vincent, Basilide, Olympia, Mary Javier, and A. de Liguori.

Their destination is Vincennes, Indiana, where they purpose taking charge of an academy and to visit the sick. They left this morning for Philadelphia.

In our next we intend giving some particulars respecting the origin and extended sphere of usefulness of the benevolent Sisters of Providence.

After consultation with their New York friends, the Sisters had decided to interview Mr. M. A. Frenaye, Bishop de la Hailandière's agent,¹⁸ before deciding upon their future movements. They bade farewell therefore to Mme. Parmentier's delightful home and crossed the East River to take the steamboat at the Hudson River pier near the Battery for New Jersey. The boat left at six o'clock in the morning, but

¹⁵ Sister M. James Lowery, *Model Lay Activity*, p. 22.

¹⁶ *J. and L.*, p. 28.

¹⁷ Mother Cecilia's Manuscript. Madame Parmentier says they did not meet Bishop Dubois, 16 septembre, 1840. S. M. W. A.

¹⁸ Mark Anthony Frenaye, a wealthy French West Indian layman, confidential agent for four successive Bishops of Philadelphia.

their new-made friends with unexampled kindness insisted upon accompanying them. Father Varela and Mr. Byerley left them at the Battery, but the former had sent a young man to be their guide. As he did not know English, Mr. Byerley offered the services of his chief clerk, an Italian named Ferrari, who spoke French and English fluently. Crossing to New Jersey the Sisters enjoyed the company of Madame Parmentier and her two daughters, who said a regretful goodbye when the Sisters boarded the railway train which was to take them to Philadelphia.

The primitive South Amboy and Camden railroad, the first rail route from New York to Philadelphia, had been opened to traffic along the old New York stage coach road for nine years and its English-built locomotive, the John Bull, had been imported about the same time. This was the first locomotive the Sisters had seen as at that time the railroad was almost unknown in France, and the speed and convenience of the steam cars were a constant source of wonderment.

Finally we arrived at the other side, where the immense engine which was to take us was already smoking. More than a hundred persons were elbowing each other, each one wanting to enter first. . . . preceded and followed by our attentive guides, we entered one of these large coaches where forty persons can be seated. As many as sixteen of these coaches can be drawn by the same engine. Hardly were we seated when the whole thing started off like lightning. We beheld unfolding before our eyes a magnificent country, verdant and fertile fields, charming villages, their frame houses painted white with pretty green window casements and blinds of the same color. All this was new and produced a delightful effect.¹⁹

The railroad ran along the Delaware and Raritan Canal where the train quickly left behind the numerous canal boats drawn by horses trotting along the tow path on the opposite side.

The travelers reached Philadelphia in mid-afternoon and at once sought out Mr. Frenaye to whom Bishop de la Hailandière had referred them. They found him at the house of Monsignor Conwell, Bishop of Philadelphia. Mr. Frenaye knew of their coming and expected them but had no directions from Bishop de la Hailandière regarding their further movements. He was in a position, however, to advance the funds without which the western journey would have been an impossibility. He knew they were not to be met and had himself assured the Bishop that they could travel with perfect safety without knowing English. Bishop Conwell, when he was consulted, agreed with Mother Theodore in her reluctance to go any farther without hearing from Bishop de la Hailandière, and she wrote again to His Lordship. Mr. Frenaye wrote also that the Sisters were in Philadelphia awaiting someone to accompany them to Indiana. He conducted them to the Sisters of Charity at Saint Joseph's Orphan Asylum at Seventh and Spruce Streets, to whom kind Bishop Conwell had commended them. Here they made their first acquaintance with American Sisters, and the Superior, Sister Petronilla,²⁰ received them hospitably and charmed them by her dignity and religious demeanor. For five days they were the guests of these gracious Sisters, none of whom

¹⁹ *J. and L.*, p. 33.

²⁰ E. C. Donnelly, *Life of Sister Mary Gonzaga Grace* (privately printed, Philadelphia, 1900), p. 71.

spoke French yet all of whom found a way to cheer and encourage the distressed foreigners. Bishop Conwell, too, gave them repeated marks of kindly interest; and when their arrival became known, a crowd of French people came to see them.

Philadelphia they found "much prettier than New York. Except the public monuments, I do not think I have seen anything in Paris that approaches the richness and splendor of this 'Queen City of America,'" wrote Mother Theodore.²¹ They admired the beautiful location of the city surrounded by superb hills on whose sloping sides were beautiful English gardens and houses of pleasing style, the magnificent river at the foot of the hills and a multitude of steamboats and ships with the flags of all the European nations. On the roads and streets innumerable railroad trains clouded the air. "This is America near the seacoast, a world of action, of opulence, of magnificence, of courtesy."²² The Sisters were deeply edified by the faith and piety of the large numbers of Catholics, many of them, they were told, recent converts, and by the solemnity of the religious services. During their days of waiting, the Canadian priest, Father William Chartier, of whom they had heard in New York, arrived in Philadelphia on his way to Vincennes. As he spoke both French and English the opportunity of traveling with him seemed providential. Their departure was fixed therefore for September 18.

At last they set out upon their month-long journey westward by railroad, steamboat, stage, and canal. They traveled slowly with many unavoidable delays and stayed with the Sisters of Charity wherever they were to be found en route. Going by steamboat and train to Baltimore, they were met by the Sulpicians of Saint Mary's Seminary and heard Mass and received Holy Communion at the Cathedral. Father Louis Deluol, Vicar General and superior of the Sulpicians, called upon them; and on Saturday they left by rail over the Baltimore and Ohio for Frederick, at that time the site of the Jesuit novitiate. Here at the academy of the Sisters of Charity they had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Mother Rose White, Mother Seton's successor as superior of the Emmitsburg Sisters. Mother Rose was then almost at the end of her long career, and her recital of the hardships and trials of the beginnings in Saint Joseph's Valley encouraged the little group of missionaries as yet so unacquainted with American ways and needs. This venerable Mother was able to give them information, valuable if a little disconcerting, on the requirements of the American schools, "various sciences hardly known in our French schools, but . . . music . . . is the indispensable thing in this country, even for the poor."²³

On Sunday morning after Mass they took the stage for Wheeling. Past Hagerstown straight west to Cumberland on the borders of Maryland they rumbled on over the old National Road, since 1817 the regular stage coach route to the West. The '40's were the heyday of the stage coach. Their equipage was no doubt the regular Concord stage, the last evolution of that pioneer vehicle, with its square top, transverse seats,

²¹ *J. and L.*, p. 35.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

and receptacle called the boot at the rear for baggage, seen on all the stage routes of the West till the 80's. The vehicles were built to accommodate six or nine passengers inside and one outside on the box with the driver, but the Sisters were alone as it was possible to engage a stage for a single party. They probably paid the regular fare, nearly seventy-five dollars for the group. Four horses changing at relay taverns every ten or fifteen miles propelled the pioneer vehicle at a brisk pace through the mountains and up through Pennsylvania to Uniontown. This was the old road which Braddock and his British redcoats had followed to Fort Necessity in 1755 when the French and Indians from Vincennes were among the sharpshooters who picked off the English regulars from behind the forest trees. At Washington, Pennsylvania, about thirty miles south of Pittsburgh, the road turns southwest to Wheeling. The trip of two hundred nineteen miles consumed two entire days and nights, and the excessive heat of the September days caused the travelers less suffering than the bitter cold through the mountains at night.

Rolling up the oilcloth curtains of the stage, they obtained their first view of American mountain scenery through the picturesque Alleghenies:

At every turn new grandeurs rose before us. Sometimes we were on the heights, where mountain tops were our footstools; below were superb defiles where magnificent valleys spread their verdure, and in the distance other mountains were superposed one upon the other so as to form an amphitheatre where the eye is lost in the ravishing spectacle, so calculated to elevate the soul toward the Author of all things.²⁴

At Wheeling the missionary group went on board an emigrant steamboat for the four-day voyage to Cincinnati. The small and wretched river boat had poor accommodations at best and these for only twelve passengers while thirty persons, many of the lowest class, were congregated in the narrow quarters during ninety-six hours. Charles Dickens, who two years later made the river trip from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati, describes the river steamer as a "long black ugly roof . . . above which tower two iron chimneys, a hoarse escape valve and a glass steerage house, then . . . towards the water the sides and doors and windows of the staterooms . . . the whole is supported on beams and pillars resting on a dirty barge but a few inches above the water's edge and in the narrow space between . . . are the furnace fires and machinery open at the side to every wind that blows."²⁵ Owing to the low water, "to put the last touch to our misfortune our boat was running aground half the time. . . . We passed the skeletons of several steamboats, foundered, burned, wrecked."²⁶ As a result of the difficulties of navigation and the poor metal of the boilers, explosions and wrecks occurred on an average of a hundred a year, but to serve the immense river traffic the boats were replaced at an equal rate.

This was the most painful period of their long trip, and the Sisters turned from the crowded quarters, the discomfort, noise, and coarse remarks of the rude passengers to the lovely scenery on both sides of the *belle rivière* as it descends to Cincinnati. The dense forest along the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁵ *American Notes* (Thomas Y. Crowell, N. Y., n. d.), p. 369.

²⁶ *J. and L.*, p. 47.

banks reflected in the water shadowed it with dark green. Like the Mississippi and the other western rivers, the Ohio runs in great sinuous bends, and the forest leaning over the banks has implanted in it the snags and planters, trees firmly embedded in the water and emerging a short distance above its surface, and the sawyers which rise and fall with the current and offer obstacles often disastrous to navigation. Early travelers thought the scenery down the Ohio second only to that of the Hudson. Thomas Jefferson considered it the most beautiful in the world. Numbers of wooded islands rise like bits of waving green forest, some of them, like Blennerhassett's, darkened by tragedy. The river was almost at its lowest depth usually reached in September, varying greatly like all the western rivers both in width and depth according to the season, swelling in the spring and winter and shrinking in summer.

At Cincinnati they disembarked at four o'clock in the afternoon of September 24, and Bishop Purcell,²⁷ informed in advance of their coming, met them at the wharf.

Small and in civilian clothes as he was, they never dreamed he was the Bishop till he told them. Their amazement at the simple and kindly manner of the frontier Bishop, who did not hesitate to meet them in person, was redoubled when they saw him assist in unloading their trunks from the boat and carry their bags himself.²⁸

After a night with the Cincinnati Sisters of Charity and a much needed rest after their seven days of continuous travel, the Sisters assisted next morning at High Mass in the Cathedral, which struck them with sadness because of its utter destitution. On September 26 they boarded a large and commodious river steamer, very different from the wretched line boat from Wheeling, and early next day arrived at Madison.

Here they expected to meet Bishop de la Hailandière, who was said to be in the vicinity engaged in pastoral visitation. Rather than continue on to Vincennes in their uncertainty regarding their prospects and future location, Sister Theodore preferred to try to see the Bishop here. They found, however, that though he had been in Madison, he had left before they arrived. They waited therefore for his return for two days at an inn, weary and lonely. At last on the evening of October 1 Father Chartier entered the room followed by the Bishop and two other gentlemen, all in civilian clothes²⁹ and covered with mud to the knees. The first meeting of Sister Theodore and the Bishop in his missionary diocese was memorable:

The Bishop . . . was handsome: a clerical exterior enhanced his natural gifts, and his fine person robed with the rich and beautiful costume of a Bishop presented an appearance of dignity and elegance graced with an air of piety that both pleased and edified. . . . The Bishop had journeyed in going from one Catholic congregation to another through some portions of the State not yet settled. . . . He was in citizens' garb, his clothes were dingy with dust and stains of mud, and with that he was very much tanned and flushed with so much exposure to the summer sun and the hot air of the season. Sister

²⁷ Most Reverend John B. Purcell, since 1833 Bishop of Cincinnati.

²⁸ Mother Cecilia's MS.

²⁹ Mother Cecilia's MS. American priests at this time and till the Baltimore Council of 1884, still wore the flat lie-down collar and black string tie of the laity.

Theodore and the other Sisters who had seen the Bishop at Ruillé had his appearance in mind as they had seen him there clad in the full purple, not . . . a flaw in his whole attire and person, and naturally . . . their surprise was not an agreeable one when they saw him dressed as an ordinary man, so sun-burnt, dusty, and . . . dry mud on his clothes; his ring was all that told who he was. Here for the first time they learned where they were to be located, "near Terre Haute," and they left again upon a large and comfortable steam-boat for Louisville expecting to meet the Bishop in two weeks in his episcopal city. Pursuant to her desire of losing no opportunity of consulting those who could give information and counsel in her work, Sister Theodore wished to visit and consult the Reverend N. J. Perché, a missionary stationed at Portland near Louisville, whom she had known at Angers.³⁰

They missed him but had instead the consolation of meeting the *proto-sacerdos* of the United States, as he loved to call himself, the first priest ordained by Bishop Carroll, the renowned and now aged missionary, Father Stephen Theodore Badin. Now near the close of his long apostolic career, he was without a definite assignment, being permitted by Bishop Flaget to exercise his zeal wherever he found need. He had returned but recently from some years spent in evangelizing the Potawatami Indians on the Saint Joseph River near the present site of Notre Dame University. The visit with this veteran missionary, who heard their confessions and said Mass for them, was an unexpected pleasure. It was the feast of the Holy Angels, October 2, Sister Theodore's forty-second birthday. Here in Louisville also they met the Nazareth Sisters of Charity at their first academy in the city, who edified them by their piety and spirit of poverty and charmed them by their varied talents. "They also teach music," wrote Mother Theodore. "Without this branch, again I say, no pupils, neither rich nor poor."³¹

Next day they embarked again on the "*belle rivière*," passing through the recently constructed canal round the rapids at Portland and leaving the Ohio for the last time at Evansville on the morning of October 5. The saintly and zealous pastor of Evansville, Father Anthony Deydier, later one of the closest friends of the Community, seemed to them so poor and even ragged in appearance that Mother Theodore's tender heart bled for his sufferings and his destitution. They were further grief-stricken to see the miserable shack where, in the old Kentucky phrase, "he lived upon nothing and cooked it himself," and where he held services for a small group of Catholics.

The worn and rough corduroy road from Evansville was notorious as the worst in a region of miserable thoroughfares. One of the early surveyors had called this type of land "nothing but a brushy slue."³² On the stage trip to Vincennes the vehicle finally completely broke down at two o'clock in the morning, and the passengers were compelled to seek a night's lodging in a farmhouse along the route. At last arrived at Vincennes, they alighted opposite the Cathedral at the house of the Sisters of Saint Joseph's, as the Emmitsburg Sisters were called. Here for two weeks sur-

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *J. and L.*, p. 51.

³² slough.

rounded by the sights and sounds of a pioneer town of the forties, they awaited the return of the Bishop.

Our Sisters have arrived, he wrote to Father Martin at Logansport. You have heard of it perhaps. Six, and others promised for next year. Novices are offering themselves in several places. I cannot doubt that God will bless our projects. Your novices [Catherine and Mary Doyle] will be received, I think. They ought to answer you as soon as the house is established. I shall ask you to go down to them to preach their retreat in French. Mr. Buteux will help you for the English. . . . I have told you that the Brothers are not coming this year.³³

Father Jean Pierre Bellier, Eudist president of Saint Gabriel's College, also announced the Sisters' arrival to Father Martin:

Six religious have arrived lately for Terre Haute. Two others, American Sisters, have come for the Vincennes Sisters to replace Sister Gabriella, whom the Bishop has sent to Terre Haute.³⁴

The Sisters' description of the location and prospects of Vincennes are tinged by the sadness incident upon their uncertain prospects. The continuous din of pianos mingled with the confused cries of animals served as background to their saddened thoughts. The Cathedral, almost ruinous in appearance, had remained practically as left by Father Champomier nine years before. The Bishop's house was but little better, small, cramped, and approached by a flight of ramshackle steps from which he had fallen into the snow the previous year. Of Vincennes Mother Theodore wrote:

I doubt whether it will ever grow much on account of its position—solitary, situated in an undeveloped part of the country on the banks of a little river which is navigable only in winter. Only one street is paved, and I really believe the others are impassable in winter. . . . Here in Vincennes we met the Eudists sent by Louis de Rennes to found a college. Their house is a good one, but not yet paid for. It was a real pleasure to see again the good Bretons who were my neighbors at Rennes. Their presence helped us to bear the ennui that we felt while waiting for the Bishop.³⁵

At Vincennes the Sisters met for the first time also several members of the secular clergy whom they had known in France. It was a hard trial to see these priests in civilian dress, and this seemingly trifling circumstance spoiled the pleasure they would otherwise have had in meeting the French priests. Their compatriot, Father John Corbe, who in France had been known to one of the group³⁶ as the decorous and priestly tutor to a nobleman's son, appeared "in the butternut brown of the Hoosier frontiersman and that not too fresh and clean." The French priests, too, in Vincennes had lost the joyous and vivacious grace of their nation to take on the chilly manner of the American character and its imperturbable indifference, so that the Sisters felt repulsed and shrank back from the friendly advances they would naturally have made. At Vincennes, too, the Sisters glimpsed the destitution, which in spite of his excellent resources, continually weighed upon the Bishop. There, too, no doubt during their

³³ 18 octobre, 1840. S. M. W. A.

³⁴ 19 octobre, 1840. S. M. W. A.

³⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 56.

³⁶ Sister Basilide.

two weeks stay the letter he had addressed to them in Philadelphia on September 18 finally reached them though part of its contents was already known to them:

VINCENNES, September 18, 1840

VERY DEAR SISTER,

At last you are in America. We shall not then be disappointed in our expectations. You have arrived with your dear daughters. Oh, what joy for us all and in particular for the one who is writing to you. When you know how ardently desired, awaited, cherished before being known you are both here and at Terre Haute, you will pardon many things which seem to you perhaps a want of foresight or of consideration on the part of the Bishop of Vincennes, but which are only untoward circumstances which he could neither foresee nor prevent.

I did not send for you for the simple reason that there was not time enough between the reception of your letters and your arrival. I did not send any of the priests because just now they are all either ill or overwhelmed with work. What then, my good daughters, are you to do? Oh, do not become discouraged. Hope rather in Providence. It has always cared for us so well. You will see. I am writing to Mr. Frenaye on these matters. I am speaking to him of the money which you ask for. Get from him, I beg of you, only what is necessary. When you reach Vincennes, we will understand each other. Be sure I shall not go bankrupt. If you need absolutely more than your traveling expenses, he will pay you on your request without saying anything of the discouraging embarrassment in which I am at present involved.

Very good superior, profit by your stay in the East to see and visit the schools, to observe the procedure of the Sisters, even to acquire some English. This is, they say, not difficult for women, pleantry aside. Try, my dear superior, to see all there is of esteem and affection for you in my soul, and put off judging and condemning till you reach Vincennes. Then we will agree, I hope, at least upon the essentials and especially on the choice which has been made of the country for the location of your community. You will then understand that the Bishop of Vincennes fails in many things, some because he is unable to do them, others because he does not know of them or is so bad as not to wish to do them even the best. You will pray for him. Goodbye then. Come and come quickly. If you delay, your traveling expenses will be doubled, and the rivers will no longer be navigable.

Your friend and father,

✠ CELESTINE, BP. OF VINC.⁸⁷

Sister Theodore was an intelligent and experienced executive, accustomed to view a project, its possibilities, and the means of realizing them. For sixteen years she had been a successful local superior in France. Now she was compelled against every counsel of her experience and judgment to proceed with an undertaking destined from every human viewpoint to failure. They were teachers who came from thousands of miles away to instruct the children of the Catholic settlers. Their very vocation demanded that they be located in a center of population. Evansville with its destitute and ragged pastor and Vincennes with its ruinous Cathedral and struggling priests proved to Mother Theodore that Bishop de la Hailandière could not long maintain the Sisters. And even if this were possible, it was not best nor even desirable except as a temporary measure.

⁸⁷ S.M.W.A.

Thrifty and capable Frenchwomen, accustomed to business and management of affairs, they could support themselves and need not be a burden to the struggling diocese, if only they were placed in a situation where it would be possible to fulfill their vocation. The old Latin couplet well known in the Church assigned the active orders to centers of population, monks and contemplatives to the wilderness. When the Bishop arrived, Sister Theodore exposed her views to him with candor and frankness. Her voyage west, leisurely as it had been, with considerable delays all along the route, had given her excellent opportunities by observation and inquiry to inform herself of the status of Catholic education both in the East and the Midwest. If the Sisters could be located in some rising center of population, they would soon be self-supporting, and their sphere of influence would widen of itself. But the Bishop was adamant in insisting upon the rural location for their proposed establishment. On the other hand, however, on the question of changing their habit, which he proposed as soon as he arrived at Vincennes, Sister Theodore did not yield. To Mother Mary she writes:

This holy habit, which we had given up, we resumed at Philadelphia to quit it again. But at Vincennes we put it on again never to give it up, I hope, through the goodness of God even in death. This circumstance has caused trouble. Monseigneur wishes to make one change today, another tomorrow, but we have held firm, and nothing, absolutely nothing has been changed. In order that this may continue, we must have from France goods for habits and veils, our small crucifixes for the neck, and our chaplets complete. We will find a way to pay for them. . . .

Monseigneur seems animated with the best intentions, but so busy, so poor, that truly he knows not what to do. . . . With me he appears very reserved, telling me only what he cannot avoid, but again I may be the cause of it by the resolute tone I took when it was a question of our costume or of going into the country. And what a country! *Mon Dieu!* I had to yield in this latter circumstance, because he told me first that the spot had been chosen by Monseigneur Bruté, then that all the American Communities began thus, especially the boarding schools; finally that the small sum he could devote to our house would not suffice to buy fifteen square feet of ground in a city. This last is, I think, the reason which has determined him to locate us here in the midst of a forest to instruct I know not whom.³⁸

The Bishop's remark about American orders beginning in remote and inaccessible spots has been pointed out by historians as an unfortunate handicap. Most of them began in poverty, and circumstances forced them into undesirable locations.

Yielding, as has been said, to the Bishop's representations regarding their future home, Sister Theodore, commending their destiny to the Providence of God, but against every dictate of her own prudence and judgment, consented to go on to "that dreaded Terre Haute." Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, who had been very ill during their crossing, had been taken sick again in Philadelphia but after a few days was able to travel. Now Sister Basilide fell ill. Sister Theodore was loath to start till she was better, but this courageous Sister in spite of her burning fever insisted on leaving at once. The Reverend Stanislaus Buteux, from Paris, was to

³⁸ 14 novembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

be their chaplain. The two Fathers, Stanislaus Buteux and John Vabret, both members of the Eudist order, were among the priests in the colony of clerics whom Bishop Bruté's sanctity and zeal attracted to the Indiana mission in 1836, and Father Buteux was one of the group of priests who remained some time in the Bishop's company at Vincennes for the study of English.

Some of the American prelates, as we have seen, disapproved of missionaries coming to this country who were unacquainted with English, and considering the dearth of priests at the time, the opinion shows how inept they were for the sacred ministry. The French especially, whose labors in the missionary field have won so glorious a record have never as a nation been interested in acquiring other languages than their own. Only one of Bishop Bruté's recruits, the Englishman, Mr. Shawe, who was not ordained by Bishop Bruté till March, could speak the language; but they were all young and zealous, and their progress was in some cases very rapid. Father Vabret was connected with St. Gabriel's College from his arrival in Vincennes. He was very closely associated with Bishop Bruté, and with Fathers Lalumiere, Corbe, and Parret had the privilege of assisting him in his last hours and officiating at his funeral. Father Vabret made some missionary journeys from time to time, and his name is on the church records at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on February 21, 1838, where he baptized Mary Elizabeth, daughter of James Bodine and Aloysia Brown, Catholic Kentuckians from the North Arm settlement.

Father Buteux remained in Vincennes till after Christmas of 1836 where he sang at the Midnight Mass,³⁹ but by the feast of the Epiphany, 1837,⁴⁰ the Bishop was with him at Thralls Station where he was installed as the first resident pastor of Terre Haute, North Arm, and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The Bishop listed his charge as "Terre Haute and the regions near Paris." He sent a long letter to the Leopoldine Society in Vienna written from "the huts of the Mission-Station Thralls, near the city of Terre Haute."

I find here very pious Catholic families, immigrants whom I put in charge of the Parisian priest, Father Buteux. You would certainly be interested in an exact description of the little log cabin which serves Father Buteux as a home and also as a house of prayer; but lest I ramble too far, suffice it to say that his cabin is a perfect resemblance of the holy stable of Bethlehem . . . we hope that such a humble beginning may in time expect a greater blessing.⁴¹

This was probably the identical cabin where the first Sisters of Providence found Father Buteux still domiciled, and which was again his "house of prayer" after the small frame church erected in the interval had burned.

He boarded with the charitable farmer and spent some time also in Terre Haute, where the church records prove that he occupied a room from time to time. A collecting trip to New Orleans in 1838 had netted considerable financial assistance towards defraying the expense of his new church in Terre Haute. Father Buteux seems to have learned English very quickly. His records still preserved at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were

³⁹ Godecker, *Simon Bruté de Rémur*, p. 295.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

kept from the first in good English. He had been charged with the building of the Sisters' house and of all preparations for their arrival. The little band of postulants who were awaiting them had gone on before and for six weeks had been attempting to live a religious life under his direction in the house of Farmer Thralls where the Sisters were to dwell till their house was ready. The first stone had been placed in August, and the building was just under roof when the Sisters arrived. Father Buteux had built a brick house for himself at the same time, which was almost completed.

Writing on September 23, 1840, to Mrs. Susan Williams, who had gone to Washington, D. C., after her husband's death in 1839, Father Buteux describes the preparations for the Sisters which were going forward under his direction. He had been engaged upon the erection of the Academy on August 22, commencing at the same time work on the priest's house which would require, he thought, only fifteen days to build. Then he expected to erect the brick church to replace the first frame church destroyed by fire the previous February. The new church was to be dedicated to Saint Ann and, continues the letter,

the Sisters' house will go by the name of Saint Mary's in the Woods. It is located on the spot where the old church was, and the new church will be to the left. There are already four ladies here boarding at Joseph Thralls's . . . one of them is Sister Gabriella, the best teacher they had at Vincennes, whom Divine Providence has directed to give herself to the Bishop to belong to our institution. The Sisters are called Sisters of Providence. What an enrapturing name! Has it not got any charm for you, dear Madam? And is it not here that Providence will openly discover itself to you and to your very dear children? Our church in Terre Haute has been dedicated on the 27th of July last and is under the protection of St. Joseph. Several ladies and gentlemen have volunteered their services toward organizing a choir, and I hope we soon will have a pretty good one. The ladies . . . display a great zeal and the church is truly kept by them in very good and neat order.

The door of our little Community will be always open to you. My candid opinion, I repeat it, is that your place is here, if not as a Sister, at least as a teacher in our school. You could buy a place adjoining ours. There is one of thirty-four acres for sale at \$450.⁴²

Although Father Buteux, as Mother Theodore tells us, worked with his own hands on the Sisters' convent, events did not altogether realize his expectations. The priests' house was finished before winter, but the Academy not till the following summer and the church only in 1844. It was eventually named Saint Mary-of-the-Woods like the convent.

Of the four postulants mentioned by Father Buteux, one was Mlle. Josephine Pardeillan, whom Bishop de la Hailandière had met in Strasbourg. She had crossed the ocean en route to Sainte Marie on the same ship, the *Republican*, on which Abbé Martin and his group of priests had set out for Vincennes in July, 1839. When she arrived at the rendezvous at Havre, no Sisters were there as the Alsatian Community had withdrawn its promise to send missionaries to America; but as Mlle. Mertian, Mr. Joseph Picquet's aunt, was sailing on the same ship on which the group of priests had booked passage, Mlle. Pardeillan embarked also to

⁴² S.M.W.A.

await in America the new colony of Sisters whom the Bishop hoped to secure to replace the Community he had lost. She was received as a guest by the hospitable Picquet family at Sainte Marie where she spent some pleasant months.

I am very comfortable here, even too comfortable, she wrote to Father Martin. I do as I wish, and I am surrounded by persons so kind, so considerate that I think I have never been more caressed than now. Strange novitiate! Since I have taken the resolution of leaving the world, it offers me everywhere charms and sweetness of which hitherto I had experienced but little. How many proofs of friendship from all those whom I must leave! . . . I can fulfill all my exercises of piety. I rise very early and make my meditation quite at my ease before anyone else except M. le Curé has risen. We assist at Mass about eight o'clock and breakfast afterwards. . . . Mlle. Mertian is also with me, and we have a good deal of work, which will last some time longer till everything is in order. . . . I have not even time to study English, but I begin to understand a little of what is said to me and much of what I read.⁴³

From this agreeable existence diversified by long horseback rides and pleasant companionship she was called to Vincennes by Bishop de la Hailandière. In those days of difficult communication news traveled slowly, and it was many weeks before she learned of his arrival in Indiana and of the pledges he had received from Bishop Bouvier and the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir to send within the coming year a colony of Sisters whom Mlle. Pardeillan might join.

Never have I experienced a keener joy, she wrote on learning of the Bishop's success at Ruillé. With the grace of God I shall have the happiness to be a Sister of Providence. How sweet and agreeable this thought is! At every moment I say to myself with renewed happiness, "You will be a religious. You will be placed in the care of good and wise Sisters who will teach you to love and serve God well." . . . Here I dare not show all my joy. They are sorry to see me go, and they think it is my departure which rejoices me so much. This is far from true. I am very comfortable here. At Vincennes I shall perhaps be less so . . . but why did I come to America? To do as I please and to be caressed and fêted? That would truly make me apprehensive. . . . I shall remain here till the ninth or tenth of next month.⁴⁴

She spent the winter with the Sisters of Charity at Vincennes where Bishop de la Hailandière had assembled several others who were to join the Sisters of Providence upon their arrival. In May, 1840, Mlle. Pardeillan wrote again to Father Martin, "Perhaps before long I shall go to Terre Haute." They did not leave so soon, however, but finally in August she writes from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods:

I am here in the midst of the woods, happy and content in this solitude and entirely submissive to the divine will of my God. I accept willingly the privation of Mass and Holy Communion, the only one we have. I offer this sacrifice to the good God to thank Him for permitting us to visit Him in the poor cabin where He remains for His unworthy creatures. I really say with our Father, in considering our kind and divine Jesus living in this poor habitation, of what could we complain? . . . May the good God protect and guard us in order that we may begin His work well. Ask with us and for us the virtue of humility, that recognizing all our unworthiness and powerlessness

⁴³ 24 novembre, 1839. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁴ A Rev. A. Martin, 30 novembre, 1839. S.M.W.A.

we may put all our hope in God and expect from Him only the success of our work. May He bless this work and bless us His poor children, that we may practice all the religious virtues well. Your poor Irma will not come. My heart has suffered for her, for our house, and for myself who without knowing her, love her so tenderly. I know nothing of the Sisters who are coming, but as for ourselves, except Sister G., we are poor subjects. God often makes use however of poor and unworthy instruments to accomplish great things. May His holy will be done.⁴⁵

Having learned that the Sisters were on the way, the four postulants had assembled under the hospitable Thralls roof to await them and make a trial of the religious life under Father Buteux's direction. The little frame church near the farmhouse which had been blessed on December 24, 1837, by Father Lalumiere had burned to the ground in February, 1840, but the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the log cabin where Father Buteux lived. He was often absent, however. His churches in Terre Haute and at the North Arm required his attention, especially the former which was finished and dedicated during the summer of 1840.

Of the four prospective postulants, two were from other orders, a circumstance which was far from receiving Mother Theodore's approval. One of the two, Sister Gabriella, the "Sister G." of Mlle. Pardeillan's letter, Mary Doyle, was the first of the four Sisters of Charity from the Vincennes establishment who, persuaded by Bishop de la Hailandière, were eventually to transfer to the Sisters of Providence. A convert of twenty-five or six, intelligent, well educated in French and English, she was something of a musician also, and an excellent teacher. She was well acquainted with the locality and the people as she had been stationed at Saint Mary's Female School in Vincennes since 1838. Two other young women from Vincennes had joined the group, Genevieve Dakent and Frances Thiriack. Their weeks of waiting were now at an end. Father Buteux went to Vincennes to act as guide for the last part of the Sisters' journey, as Father Chartier was to go no farther. Mother Cecilia describes his arrival at Vincennes:

Tall and spare in person, he had naturally a grave deportment, and a pious look blending with this . . . gave to his whole appearance an expression of mystical piety. He presented himself at the house of the Sisters of Charity and asked for the superior of the newly arrived Sisters. He refused the invitation to enter the parlor and Sister Theodore had to come to the door to receive him. She advanced with great friendliness to greet the future chaplain of her Sisters, but after a few reserved words he inquired when they could start. To her request to enter and talk over their common subjects of interest and concern, he replied gravely, "This is all I have permission for," a phrase he repeated again in response to her repeated invitations and instances, and bowing solemnly he withdrew.⁴⁶

All the preparations to receive the Sisters on their arrival at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had been left to Father Buteux. They now ascertained that he had made a beginning, but that nothing was really ready for them. Nevertheless they preferred to start at once and domicile them-

⁴⁵ 26 août, 1840. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁶ Mother M. Cecilia's MS.

selves as best they could in view of the approaching winter. They left Vincennes on the stage which ran twice a week, going directly north along the river following the old Indian trail which General Harrison had used on his way to Tippecanoe, twenty-nine years before, a route every mile of which had been fought over in the old days of the early settlements and Indian warfare.

CHAPTER V

ARRIVAL AT SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

"To do any good in America one must be entirely dependent upon the spirit of God."

MOTHER THEODORE

ATORRENTIAL rain of thirty-six hours had swollen the Wabash and inundated its banks all along the way. Starting from Vincennes at ten o'clock at night on October 20, the Sisters found the perils of darkness added to the dangers of the forests. Over a wretched corduroy road, full of great holes, one of the roughest coach routes in the country, the stage lurched and bounced. Six miles outside the town it overturned in a deep mudhole, and the bruised and trembling Sisters were forced to seek shelter in a wayside cabin. A fruitless effort after the stage was reconditioned to go on in the night sent them to another farmhouse a few miles farther on where they spent the hours till daylight drying their drenched clothing before a warm fire.

Leaving again in the early morning hours of October 21, Father Buteux and the six Sisters were able to reach Terre Haute in the afternoon. The stage would take them no farther, and it was too late to cross the river that day. Terre Haute the Sisters found "larger and finer than Vincennes. . . . Like all American cities," wrote the Foundress, "it is laid out on a large scale; in some places the houses are a gunshot from one another."¹ They sought out a hotel, the Stuart House, the Lion and the Eagle, or one of the several hostelries already established in the town at that time where the Sisters made their suffering Sister Basilide, who had been ill for several days, as comfortable as possible for the night.

Next morning they heard Mass at Father Buteux's new church of Saint Joseph, dedicated the previous July and built largely with funds collected elsewhere, a sturdy brick edifice which clear-sighted Sister Theodore, who by this time had a rather good idea of the American churches, pronounced "quite good for this country."² Returning to the hotel for breakfast, they cared for their invalid Sister and prepared for the last stage of the long journey upon which they had embarked over three months before. Mother Cecilia gives the details as she heard them many times from the Sisters:

It was the most unfavorable time of the year. The bottom was partially overflowed and most difficult to pass. . . . They presented themselves at the ferry to cross the river . . . in the private conveyances that came from Saint Mary's to take them to their new home. These conveyances, both for passengers and freight, were rough and heavy wagons, strong enough to wheel through the wild roads of the land.³

¹ *J. and L.*, p. 59.

² *Ibid.*

³ Mother Cecilia's MS.

The pioneers crossed the rivers by fords or by swimming their horses, but ferries across the Wabash were established very early in the history of Terre Haute. Farrington's and Modesitt's, which were the first, left the shore at different points. As a rule, these early ferries consisted of large scows, able to carry a wagon and team of horses, rowed or poled across the river. Only many years later was a steam ferry inaugurated, and the first wooden bridge from Ohio Street in Terre Haute across the river was not built till 1846.

The western roads were notoriously bad. The Kentucky historian, Reverend Victor F. O'Daniel, O.P., tells that President Hayes, who was Ohio-born, used to relate that once a man picking his steps along the grassy border of a muddy western road saw a hat upon the churned surface. Having rescued the hat, he was amazed to find a head below. "I am not uneasy about myself," said the head, "but I am worried about my wagon and team of horses, which are beneath me."

The Sisters had a good idea of a western road, since they had staged it from Evansville, but what had been passed did not compare with what was to come; they had now before them the choicest specimen of the far-famed western roads. For a preliminary in worthy keeping with the rest that would follow, they had to wait on the bank of the river to be ferried across from early in the morning till late in the afternoon. Other wagons that had arrived before them were passed first, and as the river was high and the current strong, it took a good while to ferry each party across. . . .⁴

The National Road as it crawled westward across Indiana had reached Macksville, a mile from the Wabash on the Saint Mary's side in 1835, but for years until the present causeway was built, high water reduced the Wabash bottom to a lake with the half-submerged trees showing lanes where the roads had been cut through the woods. In flood times the ferries ran to the bluffs, another reason perhaps for the long wait on the bank.

Having crossed the Wabash, continues Mother Cecilia's recital, they found themselves in what is called the "Bottom" which was in parts under water, and in others rose above it, so that . . . they went from one to the other. At one time horses and wagon plodded through mud . . . sinking deep into sloughs every few steps, and then plunging into water half way up, going over stumps and logs at imminent danger of upsetting, jolting in all directions as to make it difficult to keep one's seat and bruising the poor body most unmercifully.⁵

The National Road, constructed here of planks, led straight west to Macksville, but the Sisters' destination, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, was farther northwest on the extreme upper boundary of Sugar Creek Township, between four and five miles from Terre Haute into the deep woods.

At last we crossed, writes Mother Theodore in her journal, but hardly had we been on the road ten minutes than we were again in the forest, and the ground was so covered with water that it was like a vast pond. The plank road having disappeared, it became dangerous to travel on account of the trees which had fallen here and there. No matter! The horses were whipped up, and they rushed into the water. At every moment we were upon the

⁴ Mother Cecilia's MS.

⁵ *Ibid.*

point of being overturned, although Father Buteux went ahead with a pole to sound the road. At length unable to go any farther, the water being too deep, wet to the skin, he had to get up with the driver. Once the carriage struck a stumbling horse, and a wheel went over the trunk of a tree, and lo! the carriage was again thrown on its side. The water entered the wagon, and the horses were swimming rather than walking. It was like being in the middle of a sea, but in a sea surmounted by a thick forest; for the trees were so near together that it required all the experience of the American drivers to be able to get through. There was imminent danger for us, and we had two miles to cover in this way. . . . the water poured in on us. We thought we were surely gone this time, but the driver without losing his American coolness managed the horses so dexterously as to set the vehicle up again. We could see dry land a short distance beyond, but the water we had yet to go through was deeper than that we had already passed. The horses, however, were cheered at the sight of land and went into a gallop, the water passing over their backs. There was water in the wagon, too. No matter. Five minutes later we were rolling along on terra firma.⁶

They were now on high ground on the bluffs above the Wabash. The old River Road used by the pioneers wound obliquely northwest across the bottom, partly over the trace of the old thoroughfare from the north which connected Durkee's and Farrington's ferries along the river bank. This road struck the bluff as at present about a mile from St. Mary's near the Clinton Road which ran south from Clinton in Parke County to connect with the National Road as it slowly edged westward. "Four miles travel over such a road took the rest of the day, and it was very late when the vehicles stopped, and Mr. Buteux announced that they had arrived."⁷

They stood on the bank of a deep ravine in the dense forest. It was growing dark. The spot was probably above and south of the present beautiful grotto of Lourdes. The priest had said, "We have arrived," but to their consternation not a house, not a human being was in sight. Descending the steep bank where a rough log bridged the little stream between three and four feet wide,⁸ and mounting the opposite side, they saw a habitation farther on through the trees, a rough frame house with a few outbuildings, which Father Buteux pointed out as the farmer's house where the few postulants had assembled and where the Sisters would find temporary shelter as their house was not yet finished.

Their first act upon arriving was a visit to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in the poor little woodland chapel, "a very small log house in all the native roughness of those pioneer huts. The spaces between the logs were filled with clay . . . and the rough boards that formed the floor were unsteady under the feet."⁹ Mother Theodore's tender heart was touched to tears at the sight of the Lord of Hosts dwelling in such solitude and penury. "No tabernacle, no altar (for can the name of altar be given to three planks forming a table forty inches long, supported by two stakes driven into the ground?)"¹⁰ After the frame church had burned,

⁶ *J. and L.*, pp. 59, 60.

⁷ Mother Cecilia's MS.

⁸ Surveyor's Report.

⁹ Mother Cecilia's MS.

¹⁰ *J. and L.*, p. 61.

Father Buteux had removed the Blessed Sacrament to the small log hut, his dwelling, which had continued for eight months to serve as the only church of the district, where the horror-struck Sisters saw the poor ragged bed of the missionary in a corner, his two little tables, his few books, his worn trunk, and rickety chair, the windows stuffed with brushwood, and the Blessed Sacrament in a tiny pyx on the poor altar. That little pyx, silver without and gold-lined, had beneath a little cross-tipped cover, a receptacle for the holy oils within its detachable base. The whole, not nearly so large as an after-dinner coffee cup, is today the greatest treasure of the museum at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Mother Theodore used to tell, writes Mother Cecilia, that when they saw the place they were coming to, her strength failed her, and it was with difficulty she was able to walk down the ravine, cross the little stream below on a log, and come up to the rude habitation they were conducted to. It seemed to her that they came to bury themselves in the wilderness, for what prospect of a school where there were no families, no population? What ground was there for works of mercy in such a place? These mental inquiries passed swiftly in her mind as she trod for the first time the forest soil which she would cultivate and make flourish for temporal and spiritual good. . . . When, however, Sister Theodore saw where Our Lord reposed, it revived all her courage; she was ready to endure any privation when He took His abode in a place so poor and humble. She often spoke of the impression she received and of the thoughts she had when she knelt in adoration. The moment was overpowering, and . . . commenced a new era of life for her.¹¹

Their tears dried and their courage renewed by their few moments of communing with the King of their hearts, the travelers turned to greet the four postulants who had been accommodated in Farmer Thralls's house for the past eight weeks. All day they had been watching and waiting. The fried chicken, which was to have been the noon-day meal of the expected Sisters, had been reheated more than once. Now welcomed by the charitable owners of the frame house, Joseph Thralls and his wife, the Sisters dried their drenched garments, and then the group of ten gathered in the candle light round the rough table for a little much-needed refreshment. The house was a solid, but primitive frame construction consisting of two rooms with a porch below and a loft used to store corn above. One of the two rooms downstairs and half the loft above were kindly offered for the Sisters' use, the Thralls family retaining the other half of the house.

Over half of Joseph Thralls's twelve living children were still at home, almost all boys ranging upward in age from the year-old baby Augustine Celestine born in 1839. The older sons and daughters were married and domiciled in the vicinity in homes of their own. Mary Lucinda, the youngest daughter, was eight years old when the Sisters came, and many years later in old age used to relate how she loved to kneel on the floor before Mother Theodore attracted by her kindly smile, despite the barrier of language which at first made communication difficult, if not impossible.¹² The fact that the Thralls family consisted of some ten

¹¹ Mother Cecilia's MS.

¹² Statement of Mrs. Isabel Vendel. For further data on the Thralls family see Appendix III.

persons reveals the hospitality and charity of these good pioneers and the inconvenience they underwent so cheerfully in offering half their scanty accommodations to the Sisters.

During the evening they learned something of their surroundings. The locality was hardly a settlement; it was made up of a few log cabins scattered through the dense forest and that first essential of the pioneer farmer, a blacksmith shop. Terre Haute they had seen, and they knew from a recent and harrowing experience the difficulties of any communication in that direction. Farmer Thralls's house had been for some years the rendezvous for Bishops and missionaries on their travels, and the section was slowly filling up with settlers, many of them Catholic Kentuckians. Irish colonists, some of them engaged upon the National Road, formed a certain proportion of the population. Although the Sisters were unable to make their needs known in English,¹³ yet their voyage had actually constituted a tour of the educational institutions across the country, from New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Frederick, Cincinnati, and Louisville to Vincennes. They had therefore some idea of the character and requirements of American education. But nothing they had seen or heard prepared them for the isolation of their location in the dense forest, its consequent privations and hardships, and the seeming impossibility of engaging in any works of zeal. This it was which struck Mother Theodore so forcibly when the stage stopped in the midst of the woods, and Father Buteux announced to the drenched and tired travelers, "You have arrived."

Next morning the bright October day awaking the autumn glory of the forest gave them their first view of their new woodland home. It was so thickly wooded that the sun's rays could hardly penetrate the dense shade of the trees, part of one of the greatest hardwood forests in the world stretching from the Alleghenies westward. Impossible to depict its magnificence in all the colorful brilliance of the Indiana autumn. With the gold of the walnut and tulip and elm mingled the deep crimson of the oak and maple, the gum and sassafras and sumac, the breeze rustling the waving branches in a riot of color. Again they found the poor rustic chapel on the edge of the deep ravine and knelt upon its rough floor while the Son of God came down from heaven at the words of the priest to become their strength and encouragement. No doubt after their months of spiritual privation, they all received Holy Communion, but those were not the

¹³ Mother Theodore found admirable the facility with which most of the young French priests learned a modicum of English and could preach in a few months. As a group, however, they spoke it more fluently than correctly. Bishop Bruté's English, owing somewhat to the loss of his teeth, was so poor as to be one of the reasons for opposition to his appointment to the See of Vincennes. During Father Chassé's incumbency at Washington, Indiana, he was finishing his Mass one morning when a group of people entered the church with a child for baptism. Turning quickly to his acolyte (Mr. Matthew Burke, father of Sister Mary Viola, Catherine Burke Harrington, and Honora Burke Larrick), a lad belonging to one of the old Catholic families of the town, he said, "Run over to the house and bring me my *pennanic*." (To rhyme with tannic.) The boy scurried across and delivered the message verbatim to the housekeeper, expecting to receive perhaps some strange vestment like a dalmatic or some remote piece of church furniture. He was considerably surprised when she returned with a pen and a bottle of ink, *pen and ink*, necessary for the baptismal record.

days of frequent Communion even for the exiled spouses of Christ.¹⁴

Farmer Thralls's house and the log cabin where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved stood upon his own land. Adjoining it was the Bishop's twenty-seven acre purchase upon which were two other buildings, the finished brick priest's house and the unfinished convent upon which work had been suspended to complete the chaplain's house before the cold weather. Father Buteux alone had been in charge of the preparations.¹⁵ After Mass the Sisters' first expedition was down the steep side of one of the circling ravines, as deep as those of their native Brittany, and some distance through the woods to the west to view their unfinished convent. "Like the castles of the knights of old," wrote Mother Theodore, "it is so deeply hidden in the woods that one cannot see it until she comes up to it." The house stood on Bishop Bruté's original fifteen-dollar purchase from Joseph Thralls. Cleared to permit the erection of the first little frame church, the space was utilized after the church had burnt to erect the house for the Sisters. As yet in October, 1840, the Bishop had purchased only the twenty-seven acre site of the Academy and its environs. This building originally was intended by him as the convent.

The grounds were high and rolling, cut by deep ravines and stretched out far to the west and north. East and south of the Bishop's first purchase lay Thralls's own partly cleared farm, where his house and the log chapel were located and on which he had planted corn and a small orchard. Elsewhere and everywhere the great oaks as tall and sturdy as those on the granite mountains of Brittany, the beeches and sycamores crowded to the very doorstep, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in very truth. To clear them, the pioneers cut down the trees and burned the stumps or awaited the slow action of rain and snow to undermine the roots and stumps with decay, a process ordinarily complete in five or six years. Francis Thralls had acquired in 1835 much of the thick forest to the west which then covered the present site of the village and its church, and Jacob and Matilda Thralls still owned the nineteen acres of Guérin Hall, where the soft green of the golf links used to stretch away to the vineyards on the north.

The new building was a "pretty two-story brick house," fifty by twenty-five feet, just under roof. Two tall arched windows on either side of the front entrance gave an air of good taste and even elegance. A row of smaller windows lighted the basement and were balanced by similar openings under the roof. Compared with the frontier cabins in the forest, their little convent would be a palace. "Your edifice will be elegant and suitable," Bishop de la Hailandière had written. The plastering began some days after their arrival, but the work progressed very slowly. "All is being done little by little." Circumstances contrary to all their hopes and expectations had located them in this remote woodland in poverty and abandonment. They had found there, however, One still more destitute,

¹⁴ The rule of 1835 allowed the professed Sisters of Providence to communicate only on Sundays and Thursdays and some feast days, also on Tuesdays with the confessor's permission (*Constitutions et Règles*, 1835, p. 38). The novices, of whom there were three in the group of foundresses, went to Holy Communion twice a week, a custom which obtained unchanged for many years at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and on the missions.

¹⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 62.

more solitary than themselves, and in contemplating the humiliations of their Eucharistic King their courage rose, their love went to meet privations. "We shall have to suffer much," wrote Mother Theodore. "Many things are wanting to us, yet did we not come here to suffer, we who were so well provided for in France?"¹⁰

As the winter was rapidly approaching, there was no hope of being able to finish or occupy the convent till spring. The Sisters began therefore to try to accommodate themselves to their crowded and inconvenient quarters in the Thralls farmhouse, really only the single room downstairs, for the cornloft above was so filled with the rough mattresses that they were obliged, as Mother Theodore says, to dress on their beds and make them up by turns. The wind and the rain found entrance through the badly shingled roof. Sister Basilide recovered very slowly from her illness, one of the lingering fevers of the new climate, and before she was well, Sister Mary Xavier fell sick. Their restricted quarters, however, gradually took on some semblance of a convent. The dining table, the property of their charitable host, served as study and work table, as they endeavored to begin to fulfill the daily program outlined in their holy Rule. No success either temporal or spiritual, they knew, would come to them without that. This solitary room became, as Mother Theodore said, recreation room, refectory, and study room, and as their sick Sister still needed constant care, it was the infirmary also. Mother Theodore arranged the employments: Sister Saint Vincent was sacristan; Sister Mary Xavier had charge of the lingerie; and Sister Olympiade was cook, later replaced by Sister Agnes. Eventually Sister Saint Liguori and later Sister Saint Francis Xavier had the care of the postulants.

On All Saints Day their baggage arrived from New York in perfect condition, thanks to the precautions of their efficient friend, Mr. Byerley, who had their boxes specially packed for the long and rough transit westward. Soon their little statues of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph brought from Ruillé stood upon the old bureau, flanked by their few spiritual books: Rodriguez's *Christian Perfection*, Grou's *Characteristics of True Devotion*, and *Meditations on the Love of God*, and the works of Saint Francis de Sales, of Louis of Granada, Saint Liguori, Saint Teresa, Saint-Jure, and Rigoleuc. All these books are still preserved with veneration at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, several of them marked with a small printed label, "Providence de Soulaines" and "Bibliothèque de Soulaines," indicating the source from which some of the books were recruited for the Indiana mission. Above them hung the Crucifix, its white carved figure preaching a lesson of abnegation and devotedness. Their scanty meals of French soup, probably the well-known clear broth called *consommé*, were supplemented by the American bacon, salt beef, and corn bread, which Sister Olympiade soon learned from the Thralls family to prepare in her little outdoor kitchen. A rough chair for each of them and a small cupboard for their limited supply of plates and cups and tins completed their furniture.

Through the autumn splendor of the Indiana woodland reigning out-of-doors, piloted by the postulants and the Thralls children, the Sisters

¹⁰ *J. and L.*, p. 64.

explored their domain during their after dinner recreation. The lavish supply of summer berries was almost gone, but the forest offered other treasures in abundance. Wild grapes hung in rich clusters from the trees, pawpaws and persimmons were almost ripe, and an abundance of nuts already covered the ground. Woodcraft was second nature perforce to the pioneer farmers, and the Sisters early learned that the sombre forest, which encircled their woodland convent, proved on better acquaintance a friend bearing rich gifts in its hands. Thus was inaugurated the custom kept up until recent times of frequent expeditions to the woods, whence the Sisters and their pupils never returned without something useful, medicinal plants and herbs or fruits, berries, nuts, even chips for the fires.

Owing to Mr. Byerley's kindness, the first workmen to be employed by the convent arrived shortly after the Sisters reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. On shipboard Mother Theodore had made the acquaintance of a Breton family, Thomas Brassier, his wife, and six children, emigrants to the United States. She had lent him money from her meager store at Havre, and in several conversations during the voyage she intimated to him that she might be able to employ him after their arrival in the New World. He was to remain in New York till she could give him more definite information. There Mr. Byerley interested himself in the family and advanced them for their journey westward funds to be returned later to Mother Theodore from their wages. She had learned before leaving Philadelphia from Mme. Parmentier that Brassier and his family had left New York for Vincennes, and they arrived at Saint Mary's not long after the Sisters. His first duty, assisted by his sons, was to clear a portion of their forest, which would thus be ready for cultivation in the spring. He and his family took up their dwelling in one of the cabins on the premises, and they remained for about a year in the employ of the Community.

During these early days of comparative leisure, Sister Saint Liguori, one of whose talents was a beautiful chirography, made a copy of Mother Theodore's journal of travel to send to Ruillé and Soulaines, where their Mother and Sisters and their kind friends, Bishop Bouvier, Canon Lottin, M. de la Bertaudière, M. and Mme. Marie, the Countess de Marescot, and others eagerly awaited news of the travelers. In Mother Theodore's writing on the margin of Part 3 of the Journal, still preserved and dated November 3, 1840,¹⁷ is to be found the dedication of the story of their journey, the pathetic cry of an exile's heart:

Here is the story that you asked for, dear Sisters St. Charles, Eudoxie, and you also our Reverend Chaplain. If I had followed the advice of my dear companions I would send it to you only after having reread and corrected it, but I thought you would be very glad to know all about us as soon as possible. Also I wanted to show that I will do all in my power to draw closer and strengthen the double chain which must unite us. I mean, in the first place, the prayers made daily for one another; then, too, an active correspondence which will maintain our relations with one another. If you will help, if you will not abandon us, if we are always your cherished daughters, and you give us proofs of it by writing to us, consoling us, helping us, we shall suffer with constancy and even with a sort of joy the infinite and incalculable privations that the Lord is preparing for us here in His great mercy. In our union with

¹⁷ S.M.W.A.

you will be our strength, and even, I may say, the source of our success. Yes, if you protect us, the work we have undertaken for the glory of God will succeed, will prosper. Of this I feel almost certain.

My dear Sister Eudoxie, it is to you that I am sending this third volume of my works. By that you will see that I do not forget you. Oh no, never, my dear and always dear Sister, never, and you also, I am sure will never forget me. Give me a proof of your friendship, my good friend, by obtaining from our Mother the permission to make an excerpt of what you consider passable from the story of the principal events of our journey for Mme. de Marescot and M. Lottin. The inexpressible interest and kindness with which they have treated us is the reason that in my thoughts, my affections, and my prayers, and in the labor of writing this budget I have mingled their names with yours. This recital is for them as it is for you.

Beginnings so weak will be blest. In all the circumstances of our coming, there are too visible marks of God's Providence to permit me to doubt it, but if you abandon us, we shall lose courage. I feel it, and I have painfully experienced it on leaving France. I will suffer everything except your forgetfulness, your indifference. I conjure you, do not give us this cross, and believe me, we shall not lack crosses. Pray for us. Love us as we love you. It will be much indeed if it is measured by the affection for you all, Mothers Sisters, and Friends, that is borne toward you by

Your very affectionate daughter
and sister and friend,

SISTER ST. THEODORE

Write to us very soon. You can address mail to me like the parcels I send you by putting double postage with the address. The letters will cost us like this one, only half a dollar. Irma must write to me. All our Sisters send much love. Write to us, I beg of you. Oh, how long you have waited. A letter has reached us from France, but it was not from you. It was from our passport thief in France, not from you!

The Sisters' first and most urgent duty when their unpacking was finished was the study of English. In this the young American postulant, Miss Mary Doyle, was an efficient preceptor. Mlle. Pardeillan, although she had been over a year in America, had been at Sainte Marie and Vincennes almost always in a French environment and had made but little progress in speaking English. Meanwhile Mother Theodore was studying their location for its possibilities for the fulfillment of their vocation. The object of their mission was primarily the foundation of a motherhouse, but also the instruction of children. "It is astonishing that this remote solitude has been chosen for a novitiate and especially for an academy," she wrote. "All appearances are against it."¹⁵ Plans and hopes, however, were crystallizing. Sister Basilide was learning English very rapidly and already gave promise of her future success as a teacher. The general health of the group was improving, and strengthened by their daily Mass and by the privilege of having the Blessed Sacrament so near them in the little woodland chapel, their minds were already filled with projects for the future.

The fierce and cruel American winter, of which they had heard terrifying accounts, was almost upon them, however, when one day in early No-

¹⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 65.

vember, Bishop de la Hailandière arrived. Almost the first event of his visit was the formal opening of the novitiate with the singing of the *Ave Maris Stella* and the *Veni Creator*. The three postulants were received, Yvonne Josephine Pardeillan, henceforth to be known as Sister Marie Joseph; Mary Doyle as Sister Aloysia; and Genevieve Dakent¹⁹ as Sister Agnes. One postulant, Miss Thiriack, had already withdrawn on account of poor health. Many subjects of discussion occupied the time of the Bishop's stay, and undoubtedly one of the first points brought forward by Mother Theodore was a change of location. On this, however, he was obdurate. Mother Theodore quickly found that nothing was gained by her urgent words.²⁰ Nor did he yield later when the situation and his own destitution became known in France, also the presence of another religious Community in the diocese, and both Mother Mary and Bishop Bouvier expressed their uneasiness. "You represent to me," wrote Bishop de la Hailandière, "the fears conceived at Ruillé regarding the . . . location of the Sisters of Providence in the country. These fears, my Lord, are unfounded."²¹

Trends of population growth are however unpredictable, and of the several locations considered then and later for the motherhouse of the Providence order in America—Saint Peter's among the forgotten fields of Daviess County, Vincennes on the somnolent lower Wabash, Sainte Marie, now entirely rural, Madison failing with the vanished river trade, and Chesterton behind the sand dunes of Lake Michigan—the present site has something to recommend it.

Bishop de la Hailandière, however, was greatly encouraged by his visit. He felt that with the group of missionary Sisters an untold source of grace and benediction had come to the diocese. "The arrival of these good Sisters here will be for this diocese the beginning of a new kind of benefit unknown in this part of the country. I found the greatest hopes on this establishment. Already the Almighty seems to bless it beyond our expectations. Several novices have presented themselves."²²

Now again, however, when nothing was as yet settled, Mother Theodore made one more attempt to seek a more desirable spot. Mlle. Pardeillan had spent many months with the Picquet family at their growing Alsatian settlement at Sainte Marie on the Embarras River in Illinois, forty miles west through woods and prairie from Vincennes. Having known the family intimately in Strasbourg and Haguenau in Europe, she was cognizant of their plans. On coming to America she had gone to Sainte Marie where Bishop de la Hailandière had promised to send the Sisters. In her journal Mother Theodore writes, "It was a Frenchman, Joseph Picquet of Sainte Marie, Illinois, who gave the money to build our house."²³ The Sisters had been expected for months at Sainte Marie where a house and eighty acres of land were ready and awaiting them.

¹⁹ Many variations of this name occur in Vincennes although it is in reality one of the Canadian pseudonyms, the original name of the family being L'Eveillé.

²⁰ A Mère Marie, 14 novembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

²¹ 29 novembre, 1840, à Mgr. Bouvier. S.M.W.A.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *J. and L.*, p. 66.

Arrangements to this effect had been concluded at Strasbourg by the Bishop with Joseph Picquet *père*, either personally or by letter.²⁴ Father Ignace Mertian was now very loath to give his munificent donation pledged for the American foundation, whether because he could not locate the Sisters or was displeased at their failure to appear at Sainte Marie, Illinois.

Mother Theodore having learned these facts after her arrival in America and seeing the poor prospects and accommodations of their isolated location behind the flooded Wabash bottoms, proposed to the Bishop to go to Sainte Marie.²⁵ "But this is Sainte Marie," he said, "Sainte Marie-des-Bois." Here but for the friendly Thralls family they were alone in the woods. At the Picquet colony they would have been among their compatriots, welcomed, protected, and helped. However, among the Picquet family disappointment eventually gave way to resignation. "They all loved the good Bishop and forgave him and finally recognized it as God's Holy Will." Illinois was remote too and just opening up to emigration and settlement, and "Indiana was ripe for Sisters to teach in the flourishing towns."²⁶

But why, having pledged his word to the Picquets, to whom then and later he was indebted for hospitality and generous assistance both in Alsace and in America, did the Bishop without warning or explanation, change his mind? He had heard no doubt at the Baltimore Council of 1840 of the plans to erect a new episcopal see for the state of Illinois at Chicago, which took place in 1843 and automatically removed the Picquet colony from the confines of his diocese. This change of plan by which without informing the Picquets, the Bishop located Mother Theodore and the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods did not prevent their family's eventually contributing generously toward the establishment of the Sisters at Saint Mary's.

But the little convent, so solitary and desolate, was destined to grow. Of that they could hardly doubt, as already scarcely domiciled in America, they had four postulants. The French priests of the diocese were interesting themselves in the struggling Community in the woods, and among the French families of Vincennes, and the Irish Catholics and Kentuckians, more religious vocations had already begun to appear. Father Martin, who was pastor at Logansport, had two young girls whom he was recommending to Mother Theodore, Catherine and Mary Doyle, whose two brothers were preparing to enter the seminary for the priesthood. Others, too, were applying. From the first there was no dearth of subjects. To Father Martin the Bishop wrote: "I am writing from our growing establishment of Sisters . . . I have spoken of your postulants. Although the Sisters are not yet in a position to receive novices, if yours or some of them are in your judgment sufficiently prepared to be admitted, bring them with you."²⁷

The first object of their mission, to form subjects having a vocation to

²⁴ Statement by Sister Marie Amélie Merceret of the Sisters of Our Lady of Christian Doctrine, niece of Joseph Picquet.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 29 novembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

religious life was assured.²⁸ Mother Theodore's prime duty emerged from this rapid development of the Community, her daily instruction on the meaning and duties of the religious life. Six of the group, including some of the original foundresses, were not yet professed, and every day from the very first week they all gathered round the dining table in the Thralls house for the reading and explanation of the Rule. At first in French, then later in French or English indiscriminately and lastly in English, as the Community lost its bi-lingual character and became predominantly American, the custom of the daily instruction in the Rule and the principles of the spiritual life was kept up and has continued under various forms ever since.

Owing in part to this prospect of increasing numbers, Mother Theodore succeeded in altering the plan for the establishment of the Community. The Bishop had expected them to occupy the Thralls house with the family only during the winter till their brick building was finished. Mother Theodore thought that the brick house across the ravine should be completed and used for the boarding school to be opened as soon as circumstances would permit and the Thralls house purchased and used as a convent. This plan was her solution of their difficulties. Its wisdom was evident, and their situation underwent a metamorphosis when the Thralls house became theirs. It was to be for thirteen years their motherhouse, where apostles and teachers would be trained who would evangelize this poor Indiana. Mother Theodore's attentive eyes had already envisioned the repairs needful to make the farmhouse more comfortable for the Sisters for the winter. A little later they would spare eight days for their annual retreat as their voyage had prevented their making it at the usual time in September.

Moreover an immediate purchase was advisable. Out-of-doors the season was rapidly advancing. Autumnal rains reduced the winding path through the woods to the log chapel to ankle-deep mud, in which without the friendly *sabots* of their native land the Sisters floundered defenseless. The privilege of daily Mass, Mother Theodore's only request before undertaking the foundation, was still theirs, but their chaplain was pastor also at the churches at Terre Haute and at the North Arm. Mass was celebrated every third Sunday at the three localities. On the specified Sundays, the Kentuckians, the three Thralls brothers, their families, and a few others gathered at the Thralls log chapel. Not all could gain entrance, and the later arrivals knelt outside round the low door. Approaching winter would soon exclude them entirely. Another and roomier chapel was an immediate necessity. Now, however, Bishop de la Hailandière agreed to Mother Theodore's request and during this same November visit purchased the Thralls house and farm. Thralls's original price was two thousand dollars, about twenty-five dollars an acre, but eventually the Bishop paid eighteen hundred, to which at Father Buteux's request, Mother Theodore contributed two hundred dollars from their slender funds. The deed of transfer bears the date November 12, 1840.²⁹ For three

²⁸ Minutes of Particular Council.

²⁹ The first Hailandière purchase of twenty-seven acres for \$228 in May, 1840, was almost all west and north of the original purchase in Foley Court following the two ravines north to the present vineyards.

weeks the Sisters had shared the home of the hospitable Thralls family.

Two days later Mother Theodore could write to France from "Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods."

PROVIDENCE OF ST. MARY-OF-THE-WOODS,

November 14, 1840.

MY VERY REVEREND MOTHER,

I have already written to you at such length that I should fear to weary you. Yet I must write. My heart needs to pour itself forth into yours, and you will, without doubt, not refuse me this satisfaction. It is not, however, to speak to you of our future, of which I know no more than you, but of the actual situation.

You know that we embarked in our religious habits, and that we wore them in New York, as I think I wrote you. I did not tell you, however, that by the order of the Bishop of that city, we were obliged to make some changes. In spite of our extreme repugnance, we thought we should obey, as he gave us motives so religious and so upright that I would have considered myself guilty to reject them. We bought what was necessary, and we were metamorphosed into I know not what, but the fact is that we have something that is neither a religious costume nor a secular. No one is deceived, as it was said everywhere that we were Sisters. I shall not mention our sacrifice. God alone knows what it cost our hearts. Also He has seen our motives, and He will be the judge. I had not spoken to you of this, fearing to give you pain, but it has worn upon me and troubled me. That is why I begin with this detail today. That proves to you that if it is a duty for me to keep you informed of what occurs here, it is also a necessity. . . .

In Vincennes, there are Sisters of Charity, but they are dependent upon the house at Emmitsburg, which refused to give subjects to found a second head establishment. As for his intentions in our regard, His Lordship wishes to found a principal establishment, a motherhouse, to form subjects who will later be sent into different parishes of his diocese, which is so poor. In this respect the house would do incalculable good and could be self-supporting; for board is expensive here, although food is not. We can buy beef and pork to salt for three cents a pound. Vegetables are hardly more expensive than in France. The consoling and encouraging thing here is that religion is making great progress, and Protestants are beginning to abandon their prejudices. Our presence here is a source of astonishment. The people are glad to see us and promise us pupils to learn French. You have no idea of all they teach here. Monseigneur said to me yesterday that it was specially to establish here the French religious spirit that he had asked for us; that also we had only come to prepare the way for the others you had promised him in a charming letter; that you would send Irma, and you had even promised to give him at the same time, all that would be necessary.

This Bishop counts then, Mother, on your kindness to send him at least a couple of good, educated subjects, if you wish us to succeed. I think I can assure you that with this help, we will succeed. I beg of you, then, O my Mother, to have pity on so many souls whom Jesus Christ has redeemed at the price of His Blood. They will be saved, if you wish it. I shall not propose any other motive to your generous heart. I am sure that this alone will suffice to induce you to do all you can.

To prove his good will, Monseigneur has just bought us two tilled fields and a little orchard quite near the house they are building for us; but as the most pressing concern for us was a lodging for the winter, we have bought the house where we are, which is, as I have already told you, a little farm house,

the only one of its kind I have ever seen in this country. This house, which is in reality only a cabin, will cost four hundred dollars gold. I still had the thousand francs that Mme. de Marescot had sent me at Havre. I thought I could not do better than to give them, for otherwise we would have had neither house, nor field, nor orchard. . . . It was absolutely impossible to spend the winter, which is already very cold, and will become colder, in a cabin open to all the winds, which had neither doors nor windows that close. Repairs had to be made, and this could not be done, as we were mixed up with the farmers and their children. . . . Now at least, however badly situated, we are "chez nous." We can fulfill our Rule, and we shall have the inestimable advantage of having the Blessed Sacrament. It will help us to suffer, and to die if we must. With Jesus, what have we to fear? We also have Holy Mass every day. . . .

We are to have a retreat in our cabin, which will do us much good. It will be given by Mr. Martin and will commence the first Sunday of Advent and last ten days. Our preacher will speak French, which is better, as we learn slowly and are not able yet to ask or to understand the least thing in English. . . .

Adieu, Mother. Pray for me; heavy crosses are reserved to me here. Happily I had *made my novitiate*. I am ready for all that Heaven may please to ordain. I recommend myself and all my poor exiles to the prayers of our Sisters. How happy they are! But no, we can suffer more than they, and consequently have more happiness! I cannot tell all the love that the good God has put in my heart for the cross. Again adieu, dear Mother. Accept the very respectful homage of all your American daughters. . . .

I must tell you that Monseigneur requires that they call me *Mère*. This name gave me pain; then I found that it was to cost my Sisters, poor children, very much. What a mother they have! What a difference! Finally I forbade them to call me by that name. *Mother* would pain them less. I shall say like St. Paul, "I can do all things in Him Who strengthens me." The extreme poverty which we suffer, the hunger and cold of these icy countries, and all of that nature will not be really my crosses. I foresee others much heavier; but heaven is the price of all, and Calvary is the way.³⁰

Thralls kindly gave over the house and farm with domestic animals and equipment almost immediately to the Sisters and with his family withdrew to another location a mile or two away and south of the present village of Saint Mary's, which became the family homestead and upon part of which his descendants are still living. The Sisters continued to use the room to the left of the door for assembly and study room, refectory and infirmary, but moving into the vacated quarters gave them at once space for a chapel in the large room to the right with two south windows and a fireplace. Along the northside of the house, which faced the south, ran a small porch which, eventually enclosed, became their chapel for years. On November 27, 1840, they were at last in possession.³¹ All the next day the Sisters and postulants worked together preparing as best they could a home under their own roof for their Divine Guest, and on the morning of November 29, Mass was said there for the first time, and the Blessed Sacrament reserved by Father Buteux. It was in this same chapel that Father Augustin Martin, the Vicar General, who arrived from Logansport on the thirtieth, opened their first retreat, destined to be a little oasis of con-

³⁰ S.M.W.A.

³¹ Community Diary.

solation and spiritual joy in their life of privation and sacrifice. The severe frontier winter was now upon them, but with their general Communion and renovation of vows at the close of the retreat by the three professed Sisters, and permission for Benediction every Thursday, which Father Martin granted them, they took up their burdens courageously.

The diary records little for the bleak days of December. Two more postulants joined them, and now in the isolated farmhouse in the woods there were twelve persons to care for. A major catastrophe at this time was the death of a cow. But their most vital wants were supplied as Mother Theodore had already made provision of meat and cabbage for the coming season, and wood for their fire was at their very doorstep in the forest. The chaplain's residence, a neat brick building, which served for some forty years, was by this time finished, and the Sisters spent some time cleaning it and putting up curtains as the Bishop was expected for Christmas. He arrived to celebrate Midnight Mass in the little chapel in the farmhouse convent, where the Sisters sang the lovely old Noël's they had learned and sung from their childhood in France. Thus began for them this sweetest feast of the year. The Catholics of the environs came for miles through the snow, their sleighbells ringing out on the frosty air, and knelt with the Sisters round their poor little altar, another Bethlehem in its loneliness and poverty. Next day the Bishop officiated again at the services of the day, but December 26, St. Stephen's day, revealed to the little Community a cross which almost at once imperiled its very existence.

Worn out by anxiety and privation, and her frail health undermined by the hardships and the exposure of the voyage, Mother Theodore sank into an illness, serious, even critical, from its very beginning, and from day to day she grew so alarmingly worse that the fears and uneasiness of the Sisters were acute. She was taken ill Christmas night with a violent headache and fever accompanied by a long fainting fit after she was bled. She grew steadily worse till December 29, when the Bishop returned unexpectedly and sent at once for a doctor from Terre Haute. He also despatched Father Buteux on horseback to Vincennes to bring Dr. John Isidore Baty to the bedside of the suffering Foundress. The Sisters knew as yet but little English, and young Dr. Baty was a fine Catholic Frenchman, thoroughly trained in his profession also. A graduate of the medical school of the University of Montpellier, he had established himself in Vincennes sometime before. Returning with Father Buteux on New Year's Day, he found Mother Theodore gravely ill. At first uncertain, he later diagnosed her malady as brain fever. She bore the torture of the treatment he prescribed, including repeated bleeding, and all the sufferings of her illness, with admirable patience and courage.

As she got no better, the doctor declared her in imminent danger. The Bishop never left her except to take his meals. Then he was replaced by the chaplain, who heard her confession, administered Extreme Unction and Holy Viaticum, and recited the recommendation for the departing soul.

She was so ill, wrote Sister Saint Vincent, that the doctor having spent eight days near her gave her up, convinced that she would not live through the night. The Lord, however, was touched by our prayers and tears, by the Holy Sacrifice offered several times for her, by our novenas to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to His Blessed Mother, by our Communions and other

devotions. . . . She grew somewhat better . . . and we are convinced that if she recovers we shall owe this favor to the holy Mother of God.³²

* * * * *

She was at the point of death. The last sacraments were administered to her, but although her life seemed gone, the most fervent supplications were still addressed to heaven that the life of one upon whom so much depended might be spared. These prayers were heard when hope had left every bosom. A favorable change took place, and from that time Mother gradually regained her usual health. During her illness the Sisters suffered intense anxiety for they saw no alternative if she died. The mission could not be continued, as she was the only one qualified by virtue and capacity to carry on the work and succeed in establishing a community under the existing circumstances.

The Bishop of Vincennes also was greatly alarmed. He prayed most earnestly, and at the crisis when the approach of death appeared certain, he knelt immovable in the chapel for more than an hour, and when he arose, he looked hopeful. It could be that it was his earnest prayer that prevailed. At the approach of spring she was well enough to begin to take business in hand.³³

Vows and promises were not wanting from the afflicted Sisters. Sister Saint Vincent offered her life in exchange for that of her suffering superior, and the establishment of the devotion of the fifteen Saturdays and the celebration of the month of May were among the other promises in honor of the Blessed Virgin made by the Sisters. Sister Saint Vincent describes the deathbed scene:

When this beloved friend was on the point of entering into her combat with death, she gathered all her fast ebbing strength to exhort us to serve the Lord. She begged our pardon, and turning to me asked me to write to give her last message to our worthy Mother and . . . ask her to send someone to help us. . . . At present our dear superior is better; her fever is diminished, but her pulse is still rapid.³⁴

This prostrating illness was also very lengthy. They had had sickness from the time of their arrival, first Sister Basilide, then a postulant, and finally Mother Theodore. From December to April she was incapacitated. How hard it was to give her the care, the rest and quiet that her condition demanded in their small and crowded quarters can better be imagined than described. Sister Olympiade hardly left her bedside night or day, and to her unremitting and devoted nursing must be attributed in great measure Mother Theodore's eventual recovery. By January 19, however, the patient was pronounced out of danger, but her convalescence was very slow and gradual. Her return from the brink of the grave she always attributed to the intercession of the Queen of Heaven, and she engaged to ask from an old friend in France as a votive offering a statue of the Blessed Virgin for their little chapel. When Bishop de la Hailandière left Saint Mary's the week after Epiphany she was still critically ill, and almost a month passed before in mid-February after several relapses, she was able to be up for a short while and pay a little visit to the chapel.

Reverend Mother Theodore has been sick unto death, wrote the Bishop, although I think she is now out of danger. What alarm her condition has

³² A Mère Marie, 18 janvier, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³³ Mother Cecilia's MS.

³⁴ A Mère Marie, 18 janvier, 1841. S.M.W.A.

caused! . . . To me it seems a real miracle that she is still alive. . . . How she suffered and with what patience! I have her confidence now, and I must say she gives it without reserve. Have just lost \$8,500. M. Mertian refuses to give me more than twenty-five thousand francs. The difficulties into which the United States Bank has fallen caused me to lose the rest.³⁵

Three weeks later he wrote again:

As for our good Mother, she continues ill, without our knowing what to think about her future. . . . I was recalled to Saint Mary's a few days ago, and those who sent for me thought it was to officiate at her funeral. . . . Truly the fear of losing this excellent religious makes me suffer beyond what words can tell. I felt that at her death the whole house would perish. Pray to God to preserve her life.³⁶

On this visit the Bishop, who was accompanied by Father Lalumiere, then pastor in Daviess County, officiated at the first reception and profession at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, February 2, 1841, the feast of the Purification. The ceremonial for the occasion reproduced as far as possible the procedure customary at Ruillé. The three professed had met at Mother Theodore's bedside and unanimously decided to receive as novices Yvonne Pardeillan, Sister Marie Joseph, and Mary Doyle, Sister Aloysia. Sister Olympiade was permitted to pronounce her temporary vows. Sister Vincent Ferrer and Sister Basilide assisted at the ceremony, as Mother Theodore was as yet too weak to leave her bed, and the Bishop delivered a fatherly address to the three happy Sisters, the honored first among hundreds who since have consecrated their lives to God in this Indiana woodland. Only on February 15 was Mother Theodore able to receive Holy Communion in the chapel with the Community for the first time. "The superior is recovering with disconcerting slowness," wrote the Bishop a month later.³⁷

Still convalescent and suffering though she was, Mother Theodore now turned to the tasks brought forward by the approach of spring. Of the fact that winter was over there was hourly and indubitable evidence. One bright day in early February a long hoarse whistle echoed from the river bank through the woods, recurring again and again, unmistakable and clear in the distance, the first steamboat of the season. The ice had broken up, and river navigation was open. Thenceforward the light draught river steamers increased in number from week to week, their prolonged hoarse notes booming up and down the Wabash as their prows cut the water and crowded against the Terre Haute pier. In March and April spring was blowing in the fresh and balmy air, the trees were bursting into tiny leaf buds, birds were whistling, and the early wild flowers on the woodland floor were blooming up even to the convent doorstep. The hounds of spring were abroad in the Wabash Valley, and the forest was springing into new life. In the sugar maples the sap was pouring from cuts made in the bark by the pioneer farmers. The colorful and detailed description given by Sandford Cox applied to the environment of Saint Mary's no doubt as well as to the upper Wabash:

³⁵ A Rev. A. Martin, 26 janvier, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³⁶ A Rev. A. Martin, 13 février, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 mars, 1841. S.M.W.A.

The natural scenery of the Wabash as it was found by the first settlers . . . was picturesque and beautiful. Hills and dales, forests and prairies, grottos, rivulets, and rivers, checkered and diversified every portion of it. . . . It was in the month of April that I first saw the Wabash River. Its green banks were lined with the richest verdure. . . . Blossoms of the wild plum, hawthorn, and red bud made the air redolent. The notes of the blackbird and blue jay mingled with the shrill cry of the kingfisher, river gull, and speckled loon. . . . Large flocks of wild geese, brants, and ducks occasionally passed overhead or would light down into the bayous. . . . Schools of fishes, salmon, bass, red horse, and pike, swam close along the shore catching at the blossoms of the red bud and plum that floated on the surface of the water, which was so clear that myriads of the finny tribe could be seen darting hither and thither. . . .

Perhaps no other country ever produced a greater variety of wild fruits and berries. The wide fertile bottom lands of the Wabash in many places presented one continuous orchard of wild plum and crabapple bushes overspread with . . . different varieties of the wood grapes, wild hops, and honeysuckles fantastically wreathed together, one bush or cluster of bushes often presenting the crimson plum, the yellow crabapple, the blue luscious grape, and festoons of matured wild hops mingled with the red berries of the clambering sweet briar which bound them all. . . . Gooseberries, and strawberries . . . were soon succeeded by blackberries, dewberries, and raspberries, which grew thickly in the fence corners, in the woods, and in the vicinity of clearings and fallen timber.³⁸

Late in February when the Foundress was able to sit up for a few hours every day, an armchair purchased in Terre Haute had made its welcome appearance in the room where so short a time before Dr. Baty had declared she could not live more than a few hours. Her first care was to supervise the sowing of seed for the coming summer harvest. In March the first potatoes had been planted and the plan of the kitchen garden traced. At the end of April part of their cleared ground was sown for cabbage, radishes, lettuce, and onions. The farmyard began to resound with the homelike clucking of a dozen hens and the grunts of a young porker. The account book preserved to this day was kept with meticulous care. It is evident that the little ménage was gradually beginning to run smoothly. Food was not lacking. Eggs were incredibly cheap, a dozen for 12½ cents, flour \$5 a barrel, chickens a dollar a dozen. One of their first acquisitions was an English *Imitation of Christ*, an adjunct to their English studies. A table and a desk also were added to the furnishings of the farmhouse-convent. On the latter no doubt Mother Theodore kept her ledger with its finely written mottoes at the top of each page, betraying the spiritual bent of her mind: "All to the greater glory of God." "Love is strong as death." "I go to prepare a place for you." "Joseph was a just man." Here, too, were written their long letters to France, the one earthly consolation of their burdened hearts.

During the time of her convalescence, the Foundress welcomed a new postulant, a pious young widow, Mrs. Anne O'Neill Moore of Pottsville, Pennsylvania, recommended by their New York friend, Father Varela, who arrived on April 15. On the journey west, she was accompanied by

³⁸ Sandford C. Cox, *Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley* (privately printed, Lafayette, 1860), pp. 76, 77.

Father Lalumiere, who had been visiting in New York. Madame Parmentier wrote details in one of her affectionate letters to Mother Theodore:

I could not satisfy my heart's desire to answer your letter immediately, wish to avail myself of the opportunity of Mr. Lalumiere's return. Happier than we, he will have the joy of seeing you and speaking to you. Do not believe, my very dear friend, that I am jealous. On the contrary this good priest whose acquaintance we were so happy to make, will tell you how deeply all our friends here are attached to you and to our dear Sisters. He will tell you also the interest everyone has in you here.

The good Mr. Varela is giving you a proof of the respect and veneration he has for our dear Sisters of Providence as it is this good priest who induced Mrs. Moore to ask to join your dear Sisters. This lady will leave with Mr. Lalumiere. She is very well spoken of here, and I hope she will aid you in working for the glory of God.³⁹

Mrs. Moore, as Sister Gabriella, had a long religious life filled with good works. She was one of the foundresses of the first mission opened by the Sisters of Providence, Saint Joseph's at Jasper in 1842, and spent many years later at Saint Augustine's, Fort Wayne. She died at the mother-house March 30, 1875.

During these weeks Mother Theodore had been able to make a much-needed trip to Vincennes. She and her companion traveled to Terre Haute and spent the night at a hotel in order to take the steamboat for Vincennes early next morning. While there they again received the hospitality of the Sisters of Charity. She was still very weak, and one of the purposes of the journey was to have for a few days the devoted care of Dr. Baty. He had been distressed at some of the frontier remedies administered to Mother Theodore during her illness, remedies which had greatly aggravated her malady. Her friends in France eventually heard of this, and one of them, M. de la Bertaudière of Soulaines, wrote at once:

How could you, pupil of Dr. Le Cacheur, a half doctor yourself—no? Well, then, a quarter doctor—how could you have taken that violent drug, a true poison unless powerfully modified by other ingredients proper to neutralize its effects? What you must have suffered! There are certainly good German and English physicians, but it is hardly in small localities like Terre Haute and your wilderness that persons of great talent will choose to establish themselves. The ordinary run of English doctors, and I have known them, have a sort of routine of commonplace remedies which serve for every ill. Opium and mercury under different names are among their cure-alls. I hope that you may not experience later the bad effects of the frightful shock you have received.⁴⁰

In Vincennes, Mother Theodore took the opportunity to make some needed purchases. Black tulle for the postulants' bonnets and some other necessities were hard to procure in Terre Haute. She saw the Bishop also and learned from him that Father Martin was asking for Sisters to establish a school at Logansport.

Mother Theodore has been at Vincennes for her health which is better, wrote the Bishop to Father Martin. I told her that you wished for Sisters which pleased her greatly, although at present she has no Sisters, and money to

³⁹ Mme. Parmentier à Mother Theodore, 5 décembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁰ 20 juillet, 1841. S.M.W.A.

make the foundation is absolutely lacking. Perhaps at the end of the year, the Sisters might be furnished but not the money. The people of Logansport must prepare a house in advance, but how can they do so, who give neither to their church nor their priest? Let us hope, however, and pray. . . . I have no money and expect none for some time either. This Terre Haute affair has sunk me to the bottom.⁴¹

Later in the month the Bishop wrote again to Father Martin:

Mother Theodore has been here for a few days. She has gone back to Terre Haute, and I have just heard from her. . . . The community is now composed of sixteen members. It seems that presently all there will proceed well. If the education of each of the members were sufficient, and moreover if the money were not lacking, we would have hope of founding in a short time some small schools. But for both reasons we must wait.⁴²

Delay in establishing schools would be inevitable for many reasons of which the lack of funds was perhaps the greatest. This drain of expense must continue for some time if the property at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was to be developed. On Mother Theodore's return she found that under Sister Basilide's direction Brassier had planted all sorts of vegetables in quantity. More farm implements now became a necessity, especially plows, if they were to have their own wheat and corn for the coming season, and on April 17 the ledger notes the purchase for forty-five dollars of "our horse Mignon," long a faithful aid in the work of cultivation. Joseph Thralls's recently married son, Renus, was helping the Brassiers on the farm. Fruit was to be a necessity, and the Community invested in two installments of fruit tree plants to increase their little orchard. Situated as they were, they could not have existed during the first winter without the Bishop's help, but now with their fertile fields, their orchard, and garden promising abundant crops, they would soon cease to be the heavy charge upon the poor diocese they had hitherto felt themselves to be. But Bishop de la Hailandière's pessimism continued. On Corpus Christi he wrote to Father Martin that he had been "on a voyage to procure for our Sisters a thousand and one things necessary to their household. . . . Father Moreau's Brothers are coming and must be established. The expense at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods continues. It is an abyss."⁴³

Other matters in addition demanded Mother Theodore's attention. When May with its lovely soft breezes, their first Maytime in Indiana, dawned at last in the woodland, the Sisters to the best of their ability began it devoutly and solemnly in honor of their Heavenly Queen. May devotions were not then general either in France or in America, but at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods they began from the first and have grown from year to year in devotedness and in love. The month was observed religiously and prayerfully. Its close coincided with the beautiful feast of Pentecost. After the singing of Vespers and the *Veni Creator*, in the afternoon they drew the gifts of the Holy Ghost and spent the last day of the month in retreat to recommend their establishment to their Immaculate Mother.⁴⁴

⁴¹ 17 avril, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴² 29 avril, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴³ 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁴ Community Diary.

Flowers to place before the picture of Our Lady were a desideratum, and much time was spent transplanting the wild roses from the forest, and gathering the fragile wild flowers. Their vegetable garden, to be ringed, no doubt, as at Ruillé with a border of flowers, had still another series of hills of the useful potato at the bottom of it, but though flower seeds and tuberoses bulbs came from the Parmentiers in Brooklyn, a pathetic sentence traced on the outside of a letter to France tells of the disappointment which befell some of their gardening efforts, "Our hollyhock seeds have failed." Some weeks earlier Father Martin had brought another postulant from Logansport, Mary Ann Graham, who eventually received the name of Sister Augustine. "When she is ready, send your postulant Mary Ann," the Bishop had written to Father Martin sometime before. "I desire deeply that God may bless this poor house of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. I have already found many trials there, and I see that I am only beginning."⁴⁵

As yet they had been only six months in Indiana, and they numbered already sixteen persons, four professed, four novices, and eight postulants. Although Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer had been appointed mistress of novices, the main burden of instructing and training the young Community rested upon Mother Theodore. She had been its soul and guiding star from the beginning. Its very existence was the evident result of her high courage and energy and her wise supervision. Mother Theodore felt, however, that her work as Foundress was finished. From now on we note in her letters a recurrent pleading to be replaced by a better and worthier superior. An idea had taken root in her mind that she was unfitted for the lofty vocation of Foundress of a Congregation of missionary religious. To Mother Mary she poured forth her heart, telling in detail her relations with the Sisters, the Bishop, and the Chaplain, and explaining her situation and needs:

To induce me to come here, it is very true, my dear Mother, you did show me only a future of crosses. That fact cannot be questioned; but what motive could act more powerfully upon a heart consecrated to the God of Calvary? You informed me also that obedience could not compel me to accept this mission, but that by doing so, I would be pleasing Our Lord Jesus Christ, that the moment was at hand for making a great sacrifice for Him, that you thought me called; this good work was in my hands, and heaven appeared to have disposed everything to prepare my way. I represented to you what you already knew better than I, that I was not capable of so sublime and sacred a work.

Many times I have expressed to you my fears in this regard, but when you wrote that, in spite of my representations and all my objections, it was decided that I should go to America, oh, then, of my own free will, I embraced this dear mission with all the ardor of my heart, and I esteemed it the greatest grace I have ever received from God to be chosen among so many others infinitely more capable, to bring it to success. This sentiment was not the result of passing fervor, and I have never repented of my decision. Far from it. I can assure you that if it were to be done again, I should not hesitate but would accept it with even greater courage and resolution.

I am nevertheless persuaded that my vocation is limited to bringing the Sisters to Vincennes. They are here; my task is fulfilled, and to abler and

⁴⁵ 14 avril, 1841. S.M.W.A.

especially to holier hands is it reserved to find here a congregation of Missionary Sisters. My duty has been simply that of the ass who bore the prophet. I remember to have imparted this thought to my dear Sister Eudoxie on the day when I accepted; but this vocation, Mother, so small, so vile perhaps even in the eyes of men, I would not exchange, not for all the goods of earth, for what are they to a Christian heart? I would not exchange it even for all the spiritual joys and consolations which I could have tasted in my own country, even at my dear Ruillé, which I love so much.

You have learned from the letters of Sisters St. V. and B. that I have been very ill. Monseigneur wrote you, I think, that the danger was over. With what consolation would I tell you today, if I could, that it has entirely vanished. This wish it was which caused me to defer writing to you. But no, such is far from the truth; as a result of that terrible illness, I still have my irritation of the stomach, greatly increased, accompanied by constant fever and a general dropsy, which daily growing worse allows me no illusions on my condition. I have escaped death only by the special protection of God, Who deigned to answer the fervent prayers of my dear Sisters, of Mr. Buteux, our chaplain, and particularly of our worthy Bishop, who only ceased his petitions when he had forced heaven to grant them. Our good father has obtained this favor for us, I believe, to give me time to explain to you the real state of our affairs and to prevent the dispersal of our little flock if I should have died without leaving them any hope of receiving another guide.

Only after weighing everything carefully before God and according to your desires, examined all on the spot, I feel that I must tell you everything is perfectly disposed here for the success of our work, which will certainly prosper, I do not hesitate to affirm, if you will send us a few suitable subjects, even if it is necessary to deprive our house in France. Otherwise, without this sacrifice, our mission will fail. The destiny of our house is in your hands. One word from you, and an incalculable number of souls bought with the price of the Blood of a God will be saved to bless you during Eternity and to be your joy and your crown, for to you they will owe their happiness. Withhold that word, do not send the Sisters, and you give the signal for the eternal loss of all these souls. . . .

This is not, however, all we need. Here an ordinary perfection is not sufficient. To be a religious in France and to be one here are two things totally different, here where one must be able to say to one's dear companions at every instant, "Be what I am." How terrifying that is, especially for me who am furthest from this ideal though most particularly obliged to it. Pray, oh! pray much, dear Mother, that by my pride and my numerous infidelities I may put no obstacles to the work of God. This fear causes me to look forward with a certain satisfaction to death.

As for Sister Olympiade, it is not perhaps seriously that you tell me she fulfills your engagements with Monseigneur better than any of the others. You know that the poor child did not belong to the Congregation and would never have belonged to it, and if she replaces anyone, it is perhaps only a domestic or, at most, a lay Sister.

You see from this account, dear Mother, that we are unable to respond to the zeal of our good Bishop, who is nevertheless so well disposed towards us. Indeed to describe this zeal, words fail me. Impossible to portray his tender solicitude for me during my illness and all the benevolent attentions he lavished upon me. The tenderest father, the most affectionate mother could not have done more for an only child. Why were you not here, Mother, to see this holy and venerable Prelate at the bedside of one of your dying daughters, lavishing upon her every consolation, employing his hands, so powerful in the eyes of faith, to prepare remedies and administer them him-

self; passing day and night in this chamber of sorrow, forgetful of the most imperious needs of life to help and strengthen my sorrowing companions! If you had seen him mingle his tears with theirs, oh, then you would have had no uneasiness for your Americans; our future would have seemed no longer gloomy to you; you would have said, "Behold a father for my children." Yes, dear Mother, he is a father and in everything. He neither forgets nor omits anything which can contribute to our spiritual and temporal well-being. . . . I can say that all that belongs to His Lordship is ours, and if we have privations, they come to us only by reflection, so to speak, for Monseigneur is accustomed to them, and would take them first for himself. They would reach his dear daughters only after having broken his paternal heart. Never, I assure you, have I found one more tender, more charitable, more compassionate under an exterior whose coldness frightened me at our first arrival. You were right, certainly, dear Mother, in counseling me to suspend my judgment.

Monseigneur has no intention of establishing other religious in his diocese; our community possesses all his affection and includes his hopes for the good of religion in these forests; very great hopes are founded upon this house. I share my father's confidence in this regard to its fullest extent, provided you grant us what we ask you so earnestly. . . .

Before receiving your letter I had written to Soulaines some details of our American customs. . . . I wrote for a Mother, for Sisters and friends in haste and under the impression of the moment, counting on the indulgence of you all and judging of your pleasure in receiving these pages by that which I experienced in writing them. With the same satisfaction I shall give you soon the details you ask at the risk of confirming you in the idea that I am romancing. The manners, the customs, and usages here are so different from ours that they will appear extraordinary. Then, too, nature unfolds in our forests and along our rivers in so grand and marvelous a manner that describing even with the greatest simplicity seems an exaggeration to those who, not having seen it, cannot form an idea of its splendor. Monseigneur was right in telling you in his letters that one must be in America to form a correct impression of it. Nothing is more true. . . .

Be quite at ease over our relations with our chaplain. He is St. Jerome, or has his spirit. I assure you with him one must walk straight.⁴⁶

The material prospects, discouraging though they seemed during the long and severe winter while their Mother's illness was an ever present anxiety, had taken on a rosier hue after spring arrived. The season was advancing, and no time could now be lost in their plans to open a boarding school. Hidden away in the woods across the deep ravine, "ringed, hemmed in, suffocated by trees," as Maurice de Guérin said of La Chenaie in his native Brittany, the building had been left partly finished, under roof and plastered during the severe weather. Now, however, it was possible to resume work and complete it in order to open school as soon as possible. On May 3, Bishop de la Hailandière arrived at Saint Mary's with his architect, Mr. Jean Marie Marcile, to make plans and arrange for workmen.

During the Bishop's visit, Father Chartier, the Canadian priest who had accompanied the Sisters from the East to Vincennes, came to consult the Bishop and incidentally to pay the Community a little visit of courtesy and encouragement. They had not seen him since they had left Vincennes

⁴⁶ 2 avril, 1841. S.M.W.A.

the previous October, and they now recalled with deep appreciation the many services and courtesies he had offered them on their journey westward. A few months later, in November, 1840, he was appointed pastor of Saint Michael's Church, Madison,⁴⁷ and was superior of the Vincennes seminary later for some months. In October, 1842, he entered the Holy Cross order at Saint Peter's and remained there as superior of the Brothers while Father Sorin made the foundation at Notre Dame du Lac in November, 1842. Convinced, however, that Father Sorin's difficulties were insuperable, he severed his connection with the Community in the following year⁴⁸ and eventually returned to his native Canada. His name will be met again in these pages at a time when he was able to render much needed service. He was deeply interested to observe the progress already made by the Community during their seven months at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

After the Bishop's visit, work went forward rapidly on the new Academy, and timber was cut and hauled for the bridge, a single little footway, to span the deep ravine and the brook which barred the way from the convent to the school building. Preparations were active for the opening of the boarding school, now only some six weeks away. A welcome addition to the Community resources was Monseigneur's horse and carriage which he kindly left for their use. "I have just come from Terre Haute," wrote the Bishop on his return to Vincennes. "Everything there is going better. We shall open the boarding school in July."⁴⁹ On May 17, Mother Theodore and another Sister made their first trip to Terre Haute in their religious habit. Earlier they had been too uncertain and fearful as they had learned something of western intolerance. Only once since the day of their arrival seven months before had they seen the thriving little river town later to be so closely associated with their work. On this visit nothing untoward occurred. Purchases of all sorts had to be made, and from now on, Mother Theodore and her Sisters became a not unfamiliar sight transacting business in the stores of Terre Haute.

All the Sisters' thoughts and efforts now turned toward preparations for their *pensionnat* or boarding school. The first objective of the Indiana mission, the establishment of a house to train recruits for the religious life, seemed assured of success. Their second object, the education of youth, now also on the way to realization, encouragement filled the Sisters' letters to France.

Under the special, even I may say visible protection of heaven, to which you had confided us, wrote Sister Theodore to Canon Lottin, we crossed the ocean, the forests, and the dreaded Allegheny mountains, and finally passed through all the greatest dangers for women traveling far from their country, not only without accident but venerated and shielded by all. In all this you have recognized the protecting hand of God and have blessed Him. You know, too, that we are definitively located in a forest, and there in the midst of the woods we spent our first winter in America in a cabin. Monseigneur has had it repaired, however, in a manner comfortable enough for the country. The large brick house which is under construction for us will soon be habitable, but as it is too small for both postulants and boarding pupils, we shall open

⁴⁷ Alerding, *Diocese of Vincennes*, p. 351.

⁴⁸ Hope, *Notre Dame—One Hundred Years*, p. 34.

⁴⁹ 13 mai, 1841. S.M.W.A.

our *pensionnat* there on July 2 next, and Sisters and novices will remain here humbly in our poor domicile.

We have at present ten postulants, exclusive of those we have dismissed and some others who have offered themselves but whom we cannot accept on account of our poverty. In this country no dowry is given to girls even at marriage. They come with a silk dress, a fine hat, and a tiny trunk. . . . The education of our candidates corresponds with their poor exterior. In religion they are ignorant of the first essentials, and I am now beginning to teach them a little catechism, often with an interpreter. They ask me questions as learned as that of St. Paul the Simple, who asked of his father Anthony whether Our Lord lived before the Prophets. They tell me that the Son of God is a thousand years younger than the Eternal Father, and the Holy Spirit still younger. I should never finish if I gave you details of the absurdities which they retail. Can it be otherwise when these poor children have seen a priest only once or twice a year? And is it not surprising that God inspires in persons who know Him so little the desire of consecrating their lives to His service, and submitting themselves to strangers, this latter a virtue which costs so much to the pride of Americans, who long only for liberty and independence? There is great fervor among these good children.

Uncertain though we may be of the success of our boarding school, such is not the case with our Novitiate. If we had thirty Sisters all formed and ready to go on mission, they could all be placed within a year and would accomplish an infinite amount of good in this poor Indiana, which has needs so great, so pressing, and so acutely realized. The Protestants are as eager as the Catholics in asking for Sisters, although motivated by self-interest and business, which are the two great wheels by which all America goes forward. God who knows how to draw good from evil will doubtless cause these inclinations to tend to His Glory.

In truth, how much good there is to do here, and how great and sublime the mission confided to us! But one must be a saint to fulfill it, and I own to you, Father, that I understand better each day how far I am from the perfection of my state and from the qualities necessary for the important duty which is mine. So true is this that I rejoiced to see death so near during my illness, and now also when from a general dropsy I see myself slowly nearing the grave. To lead souls to God, one must be holy. That would be true in any country of the world, but here of a certainty a more than ordinary holiness is requisite and in the superior, a saintly exterior also.

This thought makes me tremble, and I have written to our venerated Mother begging her to send us someone who has indeed the spirit of God and especially profound humility, great piety, and an earnest spirit of sacrifice. With these, one could perform miracles here. Before the lapse of five years this good Mother would enjoy the fruits of her sacrifice in favor of this dear mission, which will be during eternity the most brilliant gem in her crown. If it occurs that my zeal animated by the sight of the good which is possible here has not produced the effect that I expected, I conjure you, Father, in the name of Jesus, in the name of the countless souls which we could win here, to induce our good Mother to send us the two Sisters for whom I am asking with so much earnestness, one to replace, or at least to assist me, a musician for our boarding school, and Irma to teach drawing. With this help I have assured her that we shall succeed, and without it, we shall fail. Only after studying the circumstances with the most scrupulous care do I repeat this. You have been our father and our friend. Be our advocate now, and if you accept, our suit is won. . . .

The Bishop of Vincennes seems to take the keenest interest in our establishment and has given me during my illness very great proofs of devotedness.

His exterior, however, is of icy coldness, and our chaplain, who is of the same northern temperature asked me lately to write to our Mother that he was an ill-conditioned bear. They are, nevertheless, men of a sanctity terrifying for my cowardice. If my illness seems to last too long, Monseigneur will probably send me back to France. In that case, I shall go to my little room in the Rue des Portes to my dear friends, but in that as in all else, my desire is to wish for nothing. . . .

If Sisters come to us, it is essential for them to write to the Bishop of New York before leaving the ship. He will send for them and have them accompanied to Mme. Parmentier's house where the tenderest attentions will be showered upon them, and their persons and their belongings will be in perfect safety. I recommend these dear Sisters especially to you. They will not need a passport except perhaps to go to Havre, and in that case a single one will suffice. I am awaiting a long letter from you, and what joy shall I have in receiving it! Have you my address? Terre Haute, Indiana, is sufficient.⁶⁰

As their project to open a boarding school became known, they were approached by a number of parents, not all of whom were Catholics, who were desirous of availing themselves of the advantages of convent training. On June 2, the diary records, the first inquiries were made about boarding pupils. During the following week three were promised, among them Sarah Williams, daughter of the estimable and devout widow, Susan Williams, long the only Catholic in Terre Haute. On June 25 the Bishop arrived in a violent rain storm for a final inspection of the building and found the workmen were still engaged upon it. Next day, June 26, the tables and benches were in readiness, and a few days later the Sisters were able to begin cleaning the house. On July 2 it was finally papered and the furniture installed.

This was to have been their opening day, the feast of Our Lady's Visitation, but even on July 4 their preparations were not complete despite the combined labor of Sisters and postulants. On that day, however, their first pupil arrived, a little Protestant girl, Mary Lenoble, "whom we cannot help keeping though we are not ready," records the diary, and of whom nothing is known. Next day three more pupils arrived, Mrs. Williams's daughter Sarah from Terre Haute, and Father Lalumiere's two nieces, Susan and Elizabeth Lalumiere from Vincennes. The final touches were given to the building and all available accommodations prepared. "We furnish our house as far as we are able," continues the diary. "In the evening [July 5]⁶¹ Reverend Mr. Buteux blessed it [the house] assisted by Mr. Antoine Parret, going from room to room, and Mr. Buteux delivered a brief discourse." The Sisters who had been chosen for the faculty, Sisters Aloysia, Basilide, and Marie Joseph, with Sister Thérèse who was to be cook, slept that night for the first time in the building, known from then on for many years as "the Academy."

The school now counted only three pupils, Mary Lenoble, Sarah Williams, and Susan Lalumiere. Elizabeth Lalumiere, Susan's sister, at Mother Theodore's advice, had returned to Vincennes to Dr. Baty's care for a serious affection of the eyes which eventually ended in blindness. On July 6 four more pupils arrived, among them Miss Hebb from Terre Haute

⁶⁰ A. M. Lottin, 25 mai, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁶¹ Community Diary.

and two young girls from Paris, Jane and Elizabeth Kelly. Two days later came Anne Law, daughter of Judge John Law from Vincennes. From Terre Haute came Mary Farrington, daughter of James Farrington, one of the city's prominent pioneer business men; Kate Dowling, daughter of Thomas Dowling, editor of the *Wabash Courier*; and the fifteen-year-old twins, Mary and Matilda Richardson, granddaughters of Joseph Richardson, the pioneer New Yorker. The two Miss Richardsons had been boarders for several years at Vincennes, where they had known Sister Aloysia and had been her pupils. The list is closed with Ellen Young from Paris. Most of these girls were Protestants, but all, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, walked through the woods and across the bridge to the little chapel in the convent farmhouse on July 7 to assist at the Mass of the Holy Ghost and the solemn chant of the *Veni Creator* to beg God's blessing upon the Sisters' work with these young Americans, already loved and cherished as gifts of God to their zeal.

The school term thus begun was destined to be quite short and attended with many inconveniences and hardships. The accommodations still left much to be desired. The iron beds, for example, ordered by the Bishop from Louisville, were a long time in coming, but Sisters and pupils cheerfully took up their work indifferent to the lack of comfort and convenience. During the hot midsummer days they toiled within doors upon reading, spelling, and arithmetic, the intricacies of English grammar, and the elements of French and German. The ecclesiastical retreat arranged by Bishop de la Hailandière and given by him during the week of July 27 in Vincennes left Sisters and pupils without Mass and Holy Communion during the absence of the two chaplains, Fathers Buteux and Parret. The French Sisters, not yet entirely acclimated, suffered acutely from the torrid American summer, and Sister St. Vincent Ferrer was quite ill. The mosquitoes were an ever-recurring pest from which they suffered then and for years.

Fortunately the vacation usual at that time was now at hand. Moreover Mother Theodore and Sister Aloysia were to go to Vincennes at the Bishop's request for the consecration of the Cathedral, and upon their return to Saint Mary's, the Sisters' annual retreat required by the Rule was to take place before their patronal feast of the Assumption. They were obliged therefore to close school. Encouraged by the success of their first tentative effort, they bade goodbye to their little group of pioneer students, who had already learned to love the school. On horseback, in wagons, and by whatever mode of transportation was available, pupils departed gaily for home. But their absence was not to be for long. Those were the days of long school months and short vacations, and classes were to resume in another month.

The Sisters could look back upon their ten months in Indiana with a certain satisfaction. Though the whole background and environment which had formed their character, culture, and habits were European, and though they retained their affection and admiration for their native land, they had cheerfully taken up life on a raw frontier and had shown their ability to adopt a foreign tongue and to adjust themselves to an alien character. Despite all this, however, there was some criticism of their

progress. One person, their chaplain, was far from satisfied at the development opening out in the little woodland Community. From the first he had shown not only a decided concern for their work, but also had endeavored to exercise an all-exclusive control over them. Learned, spiritual, and zealous, he had taken a deep interest in the postulants who had preceded the Sisters to Saint Mary's and who for some weeks had been under his exclusive direction. The Bishop had charged him also with the preparations for receiving the Sisters and had given him some measure of authority later over the temporalities of the little Community in addition to his duties as chaplain.

When the six Sisters arrived from France, a certain amount of conflict arose. Members of an organized religious body, their lives were guided by a wise and prudent Rule, which definitely regulated their relations with ecclesiastics and confined their ordinary direction in the religious life to their properly appointed superiors. The chaplain, whose sway over the small original group of aspirants to the religious life had been absolute, naturally saw his influence diminished and his authority greatly restricted. His ideals of religious life, moreover, were in some respects not only austere but also unusual. They included daily hours of individual spiritual direction in his room, recreation with the Sisters, close supervision over their trifling everyday needs, and a rigor which pursued the slightest faults with extreme severity. He thought they put too much turnips and cabbage in the soup, and they could not have an extra pocket handkerchief without his permission.⁵²

But more serious still, he found Mother Theodore far from his ideal of the Foundress of a Missionary Congregation and succeeded in imbuing her with this idea so consonant with her own misgivings. To such a degree did he succeed that she spoke again both to Bishop de la Hailandière and to Mother Mary of her wish to retire in favor of someone more capable. By this time the chaplain's plans included the withdrawal of all the French Sisters, and he went so far as to arrange with the help of the American novice, Sister Aloysia, to establish a Community more fitted for American needs and conditions. Sister Basilide was for a time under their influence, and several of the postulants were approached to induce them to forsake the failing Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods so soon to discontinue and to give their adherence to a native American body better fitted in every way to meet the needs and exigencies of American education.

The circumstances became painful in the extreme, until the Bishop, who had been unaware of the situation, was advised by Father Martin, Father Nicholas Petit, S.J., and other members of the clergy who had visited Saint Mary's, how far the disorder had gone. He therefore removed the chaplain in August from the post of confessor, to the great disappointment of most of the Sisters who were not cognizant of his plans. He remained as chaplain till December 3, 1841, when he went for a long-desired vacation to New Orleans. Young Father Parret, oblivious or indifferent to Father Buteux's plans, remained in quiet charge during his absence.

⁵² Mother Mary Cecilia's MS.

A year earlier on July 27, the Sisters had embarked at Le Havre. The intervening twelve months had been a period of hardship, illness, doubt, conflict, and disappointment. But it was a year of energetic and purposeful effort which had been well rewarded. God in His providence had visibly blessed their work. They had a convent, a novitiate with increasing numbers, a school already favorably begun and progressing with bright prospects, a well-organized ménage and a farm with its buildings and appurtenances. They had every reason to look to the future with hope and security. But much of the Community's success would depend upon the vocations they received, and already were coming to them several which could not be called other than valuable acquisitions.

CHAPTER VI
GROWTH OF THE COMMUNITY
VALUABLE ACQUISITIONS

"Profound humility, piety, and a great spirit of self-sacrifice, with these one may accomplish prodigies here."

MOTHER THEODORE

THEY have *stolen* our dear Irma. It is Abbé Cardonnet's word. They have just sent her to Brest. On all sides at present I see nothing but difficulties, obstacles, opposition."¹ Bishop de la Hailandière's indignant words to Father Martin at Logansport reveal to us a series of events that have been occurring at Ruillé since the departure of the Sisters, events which concerned the little mission at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods deeply and all but deprived it of one of God's most valuable gifts to the Congregation of Providence in America, the young novice Irma Le Fer de la Motte, named by Mother Theodore herself for her burning zeal, Sister Saint Francis Xavier.

Marie-Sophie-Julienne Le Fer de la Motte, called always in her family Irma, had entered the novitiate at Ruillé, contrary to her own inclinations but on the Bishop's advice, in December, 1839, to try her vocation with the Sisters of Providence preparatory to accompanying the missionary party to America. Mlle. Le Fer herself had never thought of being a religious. She considered her love of her own liberty and independence and what she called her "vagabond tastes" as insuperable obstacles. Her original intention, when she finally resolved to devote her life to the Vincennes mission, was to accompany the Sisters from Ribeauville as a lay auxiliary, and in that capacity, but for the change of plans which detained her in Europe when the Alsatian Sisters withdrew, she would have gone to America in July, 1839. Her entrance into the novitiate at Ruillé was undertaken purely and solely on the advice of her confessor, Abbé Cardonnet, and of Bishop de la Hailandière.

Once there, however, the spell of the religious life had fallen upon her, and the life of retirement and prayer bore immediate fruit in her soul in the beginnings of that sanctity which blossomed to maturity later amid the poverty and hardships of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Mother Mary, direct and practical herself, seems to have completely misapprehended the character and capabilities of this highly gifted young Sister. In later years after her astonishing career of exalted holiness had ended at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in an ecstasy of divine love, Mother Mary humbly acknowledged her error. "I was mistaken," she said. But now when Irma's lifework and destination in the Community were at stake, the Superior General showed no hesitation or misgivings. Irma's health was fragile, therefore Indiana was no place for her. Previous engagements and understandings with Bishop de la Hailandière and with Mother

¹ 17 avril, 1841. S.M.W.A.

Theodore, even Irma's own undoubted vocation for the missions, which had been examined and approved by several experienced priests before her entrance at Ruillé, all these were brushed aside, and Irma's departure with Mother Theodore in July, 1840, was postponed indefinitely. One more among the many crosses which weighed upon the Foundress, but placing their trust in God, Sister Theodore and her missionary novice hoped to be reunited in another year. At first Irma seems to have been completely resigned. Of her missionary vocation she later wrote to Sister Theodore:

Shall I ever go to America? Shall I remain in France? I know not—God knows; that suffices. Since He is my guide, it is not necessary that I should know the road. . . . It is true that sometimes in thinking of you and of Vincennes, my nature resists, but my heart enjoys a profound peace. There is in the depths of my being something which I never felt before.²

Mother Mary, however, had probably already decided to retain Sister Saint Francis Xavier permanently in France, a determination which was later succeeded by the decision to have her return to her family as a member completely useless to the Community.

In the meantime Mother Mary was studying her novice with a certain sense of disappointment. Her wit, her exceptional intelligence, her charming and attractive person, and her exquisite manners, all faded from the Superior General's view. She had an Arab steed, but she was looking for a Percheron. One of Mother Mary's earliest letters to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods says of her, "Irma is still a poor *patraque*,³ good for nothing, and at present has a very bad cold."⁴ Obedience, candor, humility were growing, however, already to giant stature in Irma's soul, and that truthful and intelligent spirit, admired, loved, and lauded at her own home by a large and affectionate circle of family and friends, accepted with utter simplicity and content the verdict of Ruillé upon her, "good for nothing but to love God." Nevertheless the entreaties of her family in view of her disappointment, that she would return home to choose perhaps another order, fell upon deaf ears, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier, already irrevocably attached to her Community, looked forward only to her reception of the religious habit with which she was clothed on December 13, 1840.

I had not expected the beautiful New Year's gift God intends for me. I thought the year would finish and recommence without bringing me any exterior change, but the Lord remembered me. He wishes to clothe me in His livery and employ me according to my feeble strength in His service. My poor Mother, if you knew how happy I am! I have always been afraid to die before becoming a religious.⁵

To her sister Eugénie she wrote, December 8, 1840: "Imagine you see me with a great rosary at my side. My God, teach me to say it. There was never so ignorant a religious before. Still I am very happy."⁶ Her love

² *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 123.

³ A French word long current in the Community and signifying a person partly or completely incapacitated by poor health.

⁴ 7 décembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

⁵ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 151.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

and trust and joy made her reception day the most beautiful day of her life. She describes the ceremony as it was then held at Ruillé:

My good Mother: Perhaps the time which has passed since my taking the habit has seemed long to you. But I am like water frozen into ice; I have been waiting to thaw out to tell you what course I had taken. But knowing your desire to hear something of the most beautiful day of my life, I shall begin this letter, though I do not know where it will end. It is easy to describe my toilet. I was dressed in white; but as it was cold, I had a shawl instead of the pelerine that is worn in summer, as well as a white bonnet and a gauze veil. My companions, Sister Anacletus and Sister Vitalis, were dressed like me. We carried tapers. The ceremony took place about nine o'clock in the morning. After the first Gospel of the Mass our chaplain gave us a pretty little sermon. He compared us to the three children released from the fiery furnace, and said that, like them, we ought to invite the cold and the ice to praise the Lord, and that, in spite of the harshness of the season, the 13th of December should always be a feast-day for us. He then gave us the habit after having blessed it. I kissed mine with all the fondness of a mother for her child, and then went to the hall, where I was dressed. I must have been very ugly, for I did nothing but cry. While we were out they were singing in the chapel the Litany of the Saints and *In exitu Israel*. When we came back they gave us our veils, which Mother placed on our heads; then our pectoral crosses; then our large chaplets and our crucifixes. It is easy to describe the exterior ceremonies, but to tell you what passed in my soul would be utterly impossible. God alone, who sent torrents of joy into it, can know the feeling of thankfulness and tenderness which came over me.⁷

In accordance with Bishop Bouvier's rule the novices after receiving the religious habit left the motherhouse at once for the various missions of the Congregation, where under the tutelage of the local superiors they were to complete the remaining two years of their novitiate. Irma's appointment was for the house of the Sisters of Providence at Brest. "They say," she wrote. "that it is a very fine establishment with twelve Sisters and a chapel where Jesus dwells in the Blessed Sacrament. When we have Jesus, what do we lack?"⁸ She set out for Brest early in January 1841. By this procedure of sending her on mission, Mother Mary signified her intention of retaining Sister Saint Francis Xavier permanently in France.

Some time later news of Sister Theodore's alarming illness reached the Ruillé Community. "On the third of February when the Sisters wrote to Ruillé her fever had already lasted forty days," wrote Sister Saint Francis to her mother. "Beloved Sister Theodore! I weep over her as dead."⁹

Meantime in America the news that Irma had been sent to Brest was received with consternation. Mother Theodore, slowly recovering and as yet only convalescent from her terrible illness, had written to Mother Mary begging for two or three additional Sisters, especially well formed religious and well educated teachers, versed in the accomplishments optional in the education of young girls in France but essential in America. Sister Saint Francis Xavier's cultivated mind, her talents, and especially her training and skill as an artist rendered her eminently desirable. Sisters

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

of her type and attainments would be indispensable to the success of the little *pensionnat* in the Indiana forest, which now filled all their thoughts. Several Sisters from France seemed both to Mother Theodore and to Bishop de la Hailandière an urgent need. And now even Irma upon whom they had every reason to count, was denied them. Hearing the indignant recriminations on all sides, as among the Breton missionaries in Indiana many knew the Le Fer family and all were aware of Irma's position and plans, Mother Theodore with her characteristic devotion to duty and principle took her heart in her hands and wrote to her stern Superior General in France. After an earnest appeal for help and a recapitulation of Bishop de la Hailandière's many kindnesses during her recent illness, she continued:

This is what Monseigneur is for us but far less than the truth. . . . These are the titles he has acquired to our gratitude. Is it to prove it to him, Mother by keeping Irma? I wish it were possible to avoid speaking of this to you. With filial confidence I must tell you that I had written you a letter of four large pages in which influenced too much by my pain in discussing this matter, I had used expressions which I found too strong. I feared they might wound your heart, and for this reason, I decided in spite of my poor health to do this long letter over again. Permit me, my good Mother, to beg you to consider that this young person is not an ordinary postulant. She was confided to your care as a trust, not that you should examine anew her vocation, her judgment, or even her health, but that you should form her to the religious virtues, especially those of a missionary religious in order to send her afterwards to Vincennes. Such were the intentions of her family, her own, and especially those of Monseigneur de la Hailandière, who founds the greatest hopes upon this child, and who wishes her as I said in my letter, *just as she is*.

The knowledge I have of the American spirit causes me to participate fully in his hopes for Irma. I am convinced that instead of being a hindrance here, she will be very useful to the mission, since God has given her everything necessary to succeed. Besides, that is not the point. She belongs to Vincennes. He whom the Lord has charged with this dear mission, after having consulted the persons most capable of judging her, received her from the hands of her parents. He counts upon her and very much. Will you, Mother, have the melancholy courage to afflict the heart of this apostolic man who seeks only God and His glory? For my part I could never have the strength to tell him this disheartening news. If he is deceived in his choice of this poor child, let him learn it from experience. I have very powerful reasons for insisting upon this point and that in your own interest. A letter from a distinguished personage in Brittany has just informed me that she is at Brest. I do not dare to tell you the odious judgments that are being passed upon you in that country. I am personally convinced of the purity of your intentions, and I know that you have decided upon this measure only because you thought Mlle. Le Fer would not accomplish any good here, that, on account of her youth and especially her ardent imagination, she would be too greatly exposed. Now from the very spot I say to you *before God* that there is nothing to fear and everything to hope, and I would wrong you in thinking for a moment that you will persist in your resolution. Not only will you send me this good Sister but also the two other capable persons we are asking, and if it is possible, to add another Sister for household duties, it would do much good. Sister St. Edmond has offered and would be suitable, if you are willing.¹⁰

Bishop de la Hailandière too wrote urgently of his wishes, his hopes,

¹⁰ 2 avril, 1841. S.M.W.A.

and his disappointment, and thus attacked from all sides, Mother Mary's determination began to falter. She withdrew her original decision insofar as to leave Sister Saint Francis Xavier at liberty to decide for herself, especially as she had already resolved to have Irma return to her family. There is no record of any lack of success at Brest in her appointed task of teaching, but she must have been judged a hopeless failure, otherwise in view of her well known piety and virtue, Mother Mary would never have determined to dismiss her from the Community. Later in America neither Sister Saint Francis Xavier nor her sister, Sister Mary Joseph, ever had the ability to maintain order in a group of young girls, a gift which was innate and outstanding in Mother Theodore. In Sister Mary Joseph's words, "While I am teaching this girl, that girl is talking." If as seems very probable, Irma had no success at Brest, her long days among a group of restless and unruly children must have been a prolonged torture.

The past six months had been in other respects also for this earnest and fervent young religious one of the most painful periods of her life. Brest is a cold foggy town of almost continual rain. Anxiety about the spiritual welfare of her brothers, who like so many Bretons, had followed the family tradition by entering the French navy and were often upon long cruises prevented from fulfilling their religious duties, mingled with a persistent uncertainty about her own state. The violent efforts she was obliged to make to conform herself to the apparent will of God in her regard were rapidly undermining her frail remaining strength. In addition, her old longings for the missions had revived tenfold. Abbé Cardonnet's repeated words began to recur to her, "With my last breath I would say to you, 'Go to Vincennes.'" In her perplexity, not wishing to follow her own will even when all her hopes and longings turned toward Vincennes, she wrote to Bishop Bouvier.

Knowing you by reputation only, my dear daughter, the Bishop wrote in reply, what counsel can I give you? . . . The Bishop of Vincennes and Sister Theodore eagerly ask for you. Abbé Cardonnet thinks it wrong for them to keep you, and he seems aggrieved with the mother superior general of the Sisters at Ruillé. The good superior, worried by so many remarks and accusations, leaves you free. I understand your embarrassment, and I feel the same myself . . . but I am inclined to tell you to go.¹¹

Kind and fatherly counsels these, yet not the definite decision Sister Saint Francis had hoped for and expected. Torn by an uncertainty which prayer and reflection seemed powerless to quell, Irma finally, after a sleepless night of anxiety, asked and obtained from her superior in Brest, Sister Saint Ange, permission to go in person to consult the wise and erudite Bishop at Le Mans. Events were shaping themselves more rapidly than she knew, as her kind superior not only consented for her to go to Le Mans but also to spend ten days en route with her family in the event her departure from France might be immediate. Her interview with the Bishop, all things considered, could by this time have but one conclusion. Her vocation to the missions had been examined thoroughly and decided. Her only need and desire now was for some one in the place

¹¹ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 176.

and with the authority of God to say to her *Go*. This, on talking with her, Bishop Bouvier did at once.

At last I am to go to Vincennes, Irma wrote to her parents, July 11, 1841. I have received a positive and definite answer from the Bishop of Le Mans. He read father's letter and gave me one for the superior general, who sees clearly the divine will in the result of all these circumstances. . . . I spoke to Msgr. Bouvier as frankly as if I had to die twenty minutes later. I told him all exactly from the cup of coffee obligatory each morning to the cold feet; everything was revealed there. I made a little list of my impediments; so be tranquil. . . . I cannot tell you exactly when Abbé Moreau's Brothers will leave Havre for New York. . . . It is impossible for them to go before the 24th inst.¹²

Bishop Bouvier saw at once deep into the heroic soul that dwelt within the fragile frame of Irma Le Fer de la Motte. "She is borne on the wings of love," he said. Without hesitation he approved her immediate departure, and her cup of happiness seemed overflowing. God reserved still one more joy however:

God is going to grant me the greatest grace He can bestow—to make my vows before starting for America. Next Sunday¹³ at eight o'clock Mass I shall give myself irrevocably to God. O my father, my good mother, my sisters, all who love me, rejoice with me! I am very happy. I am weeping but it is for joy.¹⁴

Incredible as it seems, there was no hesitation in allowing this delicate young Sister to embark alone for the ends of the earth. At no time was there any question of a companion for her, and she, buoyed up by the most complete and utter trust in God, though she keenly felt her isolation and dependence, hesitated not a moment. Many years later at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods she used to tell her novices, "I was more afraid of the least thought of distrust than all the dangers of the voyage." To her father she wrote (July 14, 1841): "The end of all my waverings and the pains I endured at Brest is to make my vows a year sooner than if I had to remain in France. How good God is! My vows and Vincennes! Oh! it is too much for a miserable creature like me. *Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo.*"¹⁵ By an exception consonant with the new and unexpected developments in Irma's life she was permitted not only to pronounce her vows but they were perpetual, and to them she added a fourth vow of consecration to the Blessed Sacrament.

Sunday morning I said the eternal, the beautiful words, "I am Thine forever"; for God whose mercy is without bounds has allowed me to take my perpetual vows. What more shall I say? Ah!—I have been permitted to give myself to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. I had always desired to belong in a special manner to Him in this Sacrament of His love, and He has deigned to grant my request. Oh, how good and generous He is. What will He be to us in heaven when even here on earth He gives us so many proofs of his goodness?¹⁶

She was now ready to depart for Vincennes. The time was propitious.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹³ July 18, 1841.

¹⁴ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 180.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁶ Clémentine de la Corbinière, *Life and Letters of Sister St. Francis Xavier*. Translated by the Sisters of Providence (Providence Press, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, 1934), p. 144.

Several parties of ecclesiastics were leaving France at this time, among them two for Indiana, Father Jean Pierre Bellier of Saint Gabriel's College at Vincennes, at the head of a group of Eudists from Rennes, and Father Edward Sorin of the new Congregation of Holy Cross with six Brothers of Saint Joseph from Le Mans, whom their superior general, Father Moreau, was conducting to Havre. Father Bellier's group was accompanied by a young woman from Rennes, Madeleine Berthelot, who was to serve in a domestic capacity at the seminary of Vincennes, and arrangements were made at once for Sister Saint Francis Xavier to travel with his party. "I shall leave Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir Monday evening," wrote Irma to her family on July 31, 1841. "Pray for me. Mother Mary has recommended me to Father Bellier. The girl from Rennes will serve me, which is not very apostolic I know, but it is the will of God, for it is my superior's will."¹⁷ The slow stage coach travel of those days was voracious of time, and Irma did not reach Havre till the following Friday, August 7. From there she wrote at once to her mother:

I arrived here at two o'clock. I had to come three leagues by sea, and, along with three-fourths of the passengers, had to pay tribute. . . . Our Lord in His goodness has given me as travelling companions not only six Brothers and two priests from Le Mans, but a pious layman, called M. Dupont, a resident of Tours. He was with me in the front part of the stage, while the ecclesiastics were inside. We spent a night as if at the gate of heaven. He is twenty-five times more devout than I am. We spoke continually of Jesus and Mary. . . . We could not tear ourselves from the Cross of Jesus at the foot of which we found Mary His Mother. . . . He is a saint, an angel, whom God has sent me on my journey to sustain and humiliate me; for I am a worm before his profound faith and his sublime humility.¹⁸

Characteristically, wishing to spare anxiety to her mother, she said very little of how much she had suffered on the way, but to Mother Mary she was more explicit. The brief sail of nine miles from Honfleur to Havre had reduced the frail young religious to a state of utter prostration from seasickness. Her only help was M. Dupont:

Oh, my poor Mother, the good God sent him to me to take charge of my affairs at Havre, and to help me during the crossing from Honfleur where I was so ill, and to give me his arm on the way to the religious house from which I am writing to you. What would have become of me alone with the ecclesiastics! I would rather have crawled than presume to ask their help there in the presence of more than three hundred men on the quai, and yet I was worse than fainting. O my good and tender Mother, I renew in the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, in your presence, and in that of our whole Congregation the vows I have made, especially that of abandoning myself without reserve to Jesus in the Sacrament of his love. I make anew the sacrifice of my life that I shall probably lose during the voyage unless God performs a miracle, for never can I resist such suffering again. I offer up my poor remains of life to Jesus in the Eucharist for whom I have undertaken this great mission. Yes, Mother, I offer it to Him that He may be loved, He and Mary, our tender Mother. These are my last intentions which I think conformable to yours. Pray and obtain prayers for me now and at the hour of my death. . . . I did not find the girl from Rennes, who has melted away with Mr. Bellier and so many other persons and things, but religious

¹⁷ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 184.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

of the Sacred Heart to whom God has given the hearts of sisters to receive me. The superior is taking me into her own cabin on board.¹⁹

The acute suffering of the passage from Honfleur to Havre had convinced Sister Saint Francis Xavier that humanly speaking, she never could survive the long sea voyage to America. A pathetic and forlorn figure certainly she must have been standing alone on the pier at Havre looking out across the dark ocean toward "that land of America for which I have sighed so long."²⁰ But the stout heart which had driven generations of Le Fers out upon the fierce Atlantic dwelt in that fragile frame. Her privations were complete. Her trunk was lost at Le Mans. "I am leaving tomorrow morning," she wrote, "without having the least little thing with me—not even a pocket handkerchief. Do not trouble yourself. God gives me the consolation of going like an apostle. I tell you so that you may thank God for the trials He sends me."²¹

When Father Bellier and his party did not appear, Irma would have been alone on the ship and Father Sorin pointed out the impossibility of his being responsible for her alone among the large group of men on board. Her confidence in God never wavered for an instant. As her mother said, she would have embarked upon a plank. When things were at their worst, "M. Dupont began to pray," she says, "and I waited in peace." Even at this late day it looked as though she must remain in France. At last everything was settled. The five Sacred Heart nuns and Irma, Father Sorin and his Brothers finally all embarked on the *Iowa*, an American packet, "a veritable fairy palace," in charge of Captain Pell. "I am ashamed," wrote our missionary, "to be sailing on it with my vow of poverty. . . ." ²² Her lost trunk, recommended to Saint Anthony by M. Dupont, appeared inexplicably inside the locked convent gates the morning before she sailed.

Since morning I have been dressed somewhat like a lady. I have a black bonnet, and I wear a shawl over my religious dress. This pleases the superior of the Sacred Heart, for otherwise I alone would have been in a religious costume. . . . I feel the effect of your prayers. I receive prodigious graces and my heart is not troubled on leaving.²³

For twenty days of their thirty-day voyage Irma was so racked with seasickness that she actually seemed on the point of expiring. She one day overheard Mother Sallion, the superior of the religious of the Sacred Heart, who cared for her daily like a mother, discussing with the captain the disposition to be made of her remains after her death, which they considered imminent.

The voyage had been, however, at the most favorable season of the year, the most happy and peaceful voyage that our heavenly Father could give us, not a single stormy day. God, who smooths the roughness of the waves to let the halcyon build her nest, knew how feeble a creature was sailing on the ocean, and He suspended the storms lest their violence might make me die, for notwithstanding the calm I was sick almost incessantly for twenty days. Still the

¹⁹ 7 août, 1841. S.M.W.A.

²⁰ A Mère Marie, 13 septembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

²¹ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 188.

²² S.M.W.A.

²³ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 187.

sea has not been so bad even for a quarter of an hour as it was from Honfleur to Havre. The upsetting those three leagues gave me made me write to the superior general that I certainly could not reach New York alive. I predicted my death so positively to her that now I hardly dare to tell her I am yet living.²⁴

But peace and contentment reigned in her soul despite her suffering. On the ship she was totally unable to walk even after she became a little better. She could go on deck only with the assistance of her charitable companions and could never for even a few minutes look out upon the changeful surface of the ocean.

Still I communicated as often as we had Mass, and this happiness God gave us nine times. Then when my health permitted, I followed the exercises of my good companions. All six of us were in a little cabin which served as a chapel, recreation room, and confessional. Abbé Sorin gave us readings from Bossuet . . . besides we had pious conversations which reanimated our fervor. Finally, God, as is His custom, spoiled me, although I was very lazy, very wicked, and I am apt to displease Him, were He not so good.²⁵

If you only knew how happy we are when our Divine Saviour enters our little cabin to encourage and strengthen us. We have very poor ornaments; our chalice is copper, but the priest is gold.²⁶ He has the heart of an apostle, the simplicity of the dove mingled with the wisdom of the serpent. He is admirable among his Brothers, who are in the steerage for poverty's sake. They do their own cooking, whilst we are in gilded cabins and at a table where art and nature vie with each other to flatter the senses. Oh, how happy they are! When shall I be poor?²⁷

At last the *Iowa* reached New York harbor, and to Irma's surprise the first person on board was Mr. Byerley with a letter for her from Mother Theodore. This good friend and Madame Parmentier had been watching the papers for days for announcements of ships from Le Havre. Mother Theodore too, who expected at least two Sisters to accompany Irma, had made the most careful arrangements with her New York friends to meet them and direct their voyage westward, though Bishop Bouvier, whose fatherly support and counsels were to be their help in many a sorrow and perplexity later, had written on July 31 that his efforts to obtain for her from Ruillé several educated and experienced Sisters, "such as you desire and as I feel you need," were without success. When the group of nuns, the five religious of the Sacred Heart and Irma, had disembarked and stepped at last upon their Promised Land, "Vous voilà, ma soeur," said Father Sorin to Irma, "sur la terre d'Amérique."²⁸ She knelt and lovingly kissed the longed for earth.

Mr. Byerley, a second Mr. Dupont for zeal and virtue, came to meet us on the *Iowa*, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Mother Mary. What was my astonishment when he handed me a letter from Sister Theodore, addressed to the Sisters of Providence, care of Madame Parmentier, New York. At first I thought an angel must have revealed my coming to him, for you know that I did not write a single line to America, and fifteen days before leaving I did not know how it would all turn out. I was even more surprised, I think, when I learned that Father

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

²⁶ Father Sorin.

²⁷ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 192.

²⁸ Here you are, Sister, upon the land of America.

Moreau had announced to Bishop de la Hailandière that there were three of us coming. Think what an act of humility I must make to offer the ruins of one religious in the place of so many hopes. Sister Theodore's letter was indeed incomparable. This poor Sister is in haste to hear from you. Her heart is perfect; she has foreseen all the embarrassments we might find on this long journey. She has sown flowers along the way, as she wrote me last year. Her letter will serve as an itinerary for the Brothers whom Mr. Byerley on Mother's recommendation has received and entertained admirably. Abbé Sorin when speaking to us this morning was still under the impression of his gracious welcome. He made his abjuration however only a week ago. To find so much charity in a Catholic of only eight days, is that not humiliating for us?²⁰

Mother Theodore had planned her Sisters' trip west over the Erie Canal, and the Brothers gladly availed themselves of her arrangements. Mr. Byerley took charge of the entire party of religious, and on Mother Galitzin's invitation asked Irma to go to the old Sacred Heart Convent on Houston Street with Mother Sallion and her Sisters. "I acknowledge that at this last trait of love my heart overflowed with gratitude, and I felt like saying to the Blessed Virgin, 'My good Mother, if I ever mistrust the Providence of God, I am willing to be hanged.'"²⁰ The arrival of the long expected party at the Sacred Heart convent was so great an occasion for joy in the house that one of the Sisters started to ring the convent bell. The neighbors gathered at the door in great alarm judging that the house was on fire.²¹

Six weeks of the gracious hospitality of the Sacred Heart convent did much to restore Irma's shattered strength, but the unusual arrangement of sending this delicate young Sister so far alone could not fail to excite remark. "Everyone who sees me so feeble and alone says in a low tone: 'How could they have sent this child so far without anyone to take care of her?' I do not seem to hear this, but I turn to the chapel and say: 'My God, is any one alone when you are with her?'" No opportunity offered however for her to make the long journey overland, alone and unprotected as she was.

Since yesterday, she wrote to Ruillé on September 14, 1841, I am at the Sacred Heart. I cannot thank God enough for bringing me here, for how should I have reached Vincennes alone? . . . True I shall have to wait a month, but God wishes this long delay, and I shall have good Princess Galitzin to conduct me, who is as frank and simple as a Breton and who will see me to my destination.²²

Mr. Byerley's business, so pressing particularly at the fall season, prevented him and his family from seeing as much as they would have liked of "the angelic Sister Saint Francis," as visits were not possible at the convent after six o'clock. They overwhelmed her with kindness, however, before her departure. This time she made no attempt to join Father Sorin's party, and the Brothers after only three days in New York left by canal and wagon across northern New York and Ohio and thence down the Wabash. Irma was to have accompanied Mother

²⁰ A Mère Marie, 13 septembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

²⁰ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 197.

²¹ Houston Street Convent Journal.

²² A Mère Marie. S.M.W.A.

Galitzin³³ and Madame Sallion to Canada early in October going thence to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods when Father Bellier's group with three seminarians and the girl from Rennes, Madeleine Berthelot, unexpectedly arrived in New York. Sister Saint Francis Xavier gladly availed herself of the opportunity of traveling with this party who were going directly to Vincennes. Mr. Byerley announced their departure for Philadelphia on October 15 to Mother Theodore:³⁴

It was fortunate indeed that our good Sister Saint Francis has found a traveling companion like Abbé Bellier, who has brought from France a Norman girl whose robust looks assure us that she will be very useful to a person so delicate as this little angel, Sister St. Francis.

Madame Parmentier too wrote of the departure to Mother Theodore in a letter overflowing with affection and concern for the struggling little Community in the backwoods of Indiana. Of Irma she wrote, "our dear Sister whom every one loves. The Superior of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart told me today that she will see our dear Sister leave with great regret. She appears deeply attached to her, and how is it possible not to be won by such a person?"³⁵

Over the same route which Mother Theodore had taken the previous year Father Bellier, the seminarians, Sister Saint Francis Xavier, and Madeleine embarked by water and rail to Philadelphia. Father Bellier was a member of the Eudist Society, a congregation of secular priests founded in the seventeenth century by Saint John Eudes, one of the first apostles of devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Four members of the order had come to America in 1836 with Bishop Bruté from their house at Rennes, and Bishop de la Hailandière had secured an additional contingent in 1839 for Vincennes to take charge of Saint Gabriel's College in the handsome and roomy old Vincennes University building purchased the same year. Originally Father John A. Vabret had been at the head of Saint Gabriel's, but later Father Jean Pierre Bellier became president. He had already spent some time in America but had left Vincennes the previous May for France in search of help. He was now returning with recruits for the order in its educational work in Vincennes, and was well acquainted with the route and not unfamiliar with the language and the customs of the country.

The well known missionary spirit of the French people extended not only to priests, religious, and seminarians, but to the laity as well. Skilled artisans had followed Bishop de la Hailandière to America and he had secured also the services of a group of young women who devotedly served the Bishops and the seminarians for many years in Vincennes, and who are buried in the cemetery there. Their quarters were on the ground floor of the Bishop's residence near the kitchen and the Bishops' dining room. They were organized into a quasi-religious group, and the

³³ Mother Elizabeth Galitzin, provincial and visitatrix of the Sacred Heart, a cousin of the celebrated Pennsylvania missionary, Father Demetrius Galitzin, was engaged in 1840 and 1841 in a visitation of the houses of her order in America.

³⁴ This letter was addressed according to the custom of the time to "Mrs. Theodore Guerin, Care of Messrs. W. & H. D. Williams, Terre Haute, Indiana" and was post-marked "Paid 50 cents."

³⁵ 11 octobre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

words "Virgin of the Third Order of Charity" or "Virgin of Mary" appear today upon their crumbling tombstones. Best known of the group perhaps was Jeanne Février, who lived until late in Bishop Chatard's time.³⁰ Her remote but quiet and intelligent old face, framed by the stiff Breton white linen cap and *mouchoir de cou* looks down now from her oil portrait in the old Vincennes library, painted by Clotilde Pilard Thomas. The older residents of Vincennes well remember her devout invocation upon entering their homes, "Peace be to this house." To the children's wish, "Jeanne, tell us your name," she would answer "Jeanne February." "And your age." "Sixty-ten." This unselfish and devoted group, Madeleine Berthelot, "the good girl from Rennes," was now to join. She was however no longer a girl in years as according to Father Bellier's arrangement she easily passed for Irma's mother on the canal and the steamboats.

Father Bellier insisted that the character of his party should not be apparent to the general public. Sister Saint Francis therefore resumed her secular dress as Madame Le Fer for the duration of the voyage inland. Through motives of economy he chose the emigrant route from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, part canal and part railroad, begun by the state of Pennsylvania in 1826. On the railroad from Philadelphia to Columbia, Pennsylvania, eighty miles westward, the cars were drawn over the hills by great ropes up an inclined plane, the power furnished by large stationary steam engines. At Columbia, between Lancaster and York on the rapid and shallow Susquehanna as it flows north toward Harrisburg, the party went aboard the line or emigrant boat on the canal.

Two sorts of boats plied this large canal, forty feet wide at the surface tapering to twenty-eight at the bottom and, as usual in these early inland waterways, only four feet deep: the faster packet boat for passengers only and the line boats which carried both freight and passengers. One great disadvantage of the canal system was its slowness. A pace faster than three or three and a half miles per hour was destructive of the canal as it dashed the water against the bank and wore it away. Three miles was fixed in some localities by law as the maximum pace for the horses which trotted along the tow path, drawing the boat through the water. The packets had better horses, were better equipped, and kept up the maximum speed, but all the canal boats and some of the steamboats too, regardless of their accommodations, accepted all the passengers who presented themselves, and after the narrow berths were filled, the extra persons slept on tables or on the floor. The line boats were merely freight conveyances. No sleeping accommodations and no meals, or poor ones only twice daily, were offered. By means of agents at the seaports these boats served the emigrant ships in routing settlers directly to the interior. The fare from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh for cabin passengers was ten dollars, on the line boats, considerably cheaper. The Pennsylvania canal boat, unlike the luxurious *Iowa*, was evidently no floating fairy palace, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier found herself face to face with Lady Poverty, whom she was seeking so earnestly and whom later she was to know so well in the privations and hardships of the little convent home awaiting her in the Indiana woods.

³⁰ Her tombstone in the Vincennes cemetery reads "Jeanne Février, born 1818, died, 1894."

Charles Dickens, who traversed the same route some five months later and who had the facilities of the best type of packet, calls attention to its many inconveniences, the low roof, the narrow passage along the side of the boat, and the numerous low bridges along the canal, which made walking up and down almost impossible.³⁷ The bold and striking scenery of the Allegheny Mountains, the lazy motion of the boat, the silver notes of the horn on approaching the villages, and the pleasant ripple of the water at night, as they glided on noiselessly through mountain gorges and past dark forests, were its best features.

Sister Saint Francis Xavier has left two records of her journey, one in a letter to her parents, and another written to Ruillé after her arrival at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. In both her heart overflows with faith and love and gratitude to God for the visible goodness with which He has brought her to the end of her long and dangerous voyage. That a gracious and charming young woman, a religious, who before had hardly ever left her provincial corner of France, would attempt such a journey alone across the ocean and through the wild western hinterland of America seems to us incredible today a hundred years later. That she did make it proves the courage and the trust in God which brought her later career so near to heroism.

Dickens described his packet as a "barge with a little house on it." The line boats usually had the freight piled high in the center and the end spaces enclosed as cabins.

Our hall and drawing room was but a space between decks, filled with coffee sacks thrown among trunks and boxes, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Our first night was so bad that a gentleman took flight preferring to lose the price of his passage. . . . Our boat was drawn by two old horses which gave me a chance to walk, for I could go faster than they. The views along the Allegheny Mountains are grand. We crossed these mountains by railway but without leaving the boat, as the horses and boat are placed in a car. The inventions of this country are incomprehensible.³⁸

Her letter to Mother Mary gives a truer picture of her privations:

I traveled from Philadelphia to Vincennes with Mr. Bellier to whose care you confided me at Rennes, with Madeleine and three young men he was bringing for his college. My good Mother, imagine your poor child for ten days and seven nights crowded into the depths of an old covered boat filled with bags of coffee and boxes, etc. There though unable to stand upright, we had to stay nevertheless not only all day but also all night. . . . Among all the sufferings I have undergone since July 2 when I left Brest, this was the most painful. I did not dare to make any remark upon our situation, for I knew it was impossible to change it. Mr. Bellier had paid for a separate cabin for me and Madeleine, but when we came on the boat we almost had to dispute to keep for ourselves a few feet of space, and a German was with us all the time. In all externals such as our regime, to eat meat or abstain, say my prayers of Rule or not, appear a Catholic or not, I obeyed Mr. Bellier exactly. I assure you, Mother, he reduced me to a terrible poverty. He took away from me even the sign of the cross. True, it was very important that no one should suspect that he was a priest or I a religious. Perhaps my long sleeves betrayed my vocation, but he with his guitar and his night cap on his head,

³⁷ *American Notes*, pp. 356, 357, 364.

³⁸ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 206.

no one would have guessed what he was. . . . O my good Mother, how this journey has crushed my pride. For peace and charity's sake I submitted to Madeleine without her suspecting it. She is an orderly person and essentially virtuous, but could offer nothing to render the time agreeable.³⁹

Madeleine passing as Sister Saint Francis's mother exercised all the authority of her position:

This good Madeleine⁴⁰ has rendered me many services, and she is exactly what Father Besnoin had desired for me [probably as arbitrary as possible]. . . . We went from one village to another to buy bread and meat, and our German friend furnished the dessert. Our days were lengthened by a candle set in a big red apple. Abbé Bellier would then take his guitar and with his beautiful voice excite the admiration of the passengers.⁴¹

At Pittsburgh the party transferred to a steamboat, and as the western rivers were all at the high season and navigation was open everywhere, the journey was greatly facilitated. On this second stage of the journey, Sister St. Francis Xavier had a cabin which she shared with Madeleine, and they were able to recuperate from the fatigue of the ten days canal voyage during which they had never been able to undress.

On November 9, after over three weeks en route, the party reached Vincennes, and Sister Saint Francis's tears revealed her happiness and relief that the end of her long voyage was now in sight. Bishop de la Hailandière received her coldly. He did not see her extended hand. Nevertheless he accompanied her to Saint Mary's on the long trip. The Sisters at Havre who knew the Bishop had described him as admirable for piety and acquired virtue but lacking in natural gifts and talents.⁴² He was then involved in his first large building program, and anxieties of various kinds overwhelmed him. His main source of distress was the unrest already apparent in his diocese. Under Bishop Bruté everyone had been content, zealous, and devoted, but how different in 1841! Financial difficulties weighed heavily upon the Bishop's mind, and his grants from the Propagation of the Faith in France and the Leopoldine Society in Austria were often uncertain. The desire for a coadjutor disquieted him for a great part of his episcopate. "When shall I have a coadjutor? Does not my poor command of English make it necessary for me to seek someone to speak for me?"⁴³ The melancholy and discouragement which eventually drove him from the active exercise of the episcopate were already gnawing deeply upon the Bishop's mind:

I have found in Msgr. de la Hailandière great zeal for our Congregation, wrote Sister Saint Francis. He has imposed severe privations upon himself to procure necessities for us, and yet he is overwhelmed with debt. This week he sent two of his albs and his handsomest pictures to New Orleans to be sold in order to pay his workmen. He it was who drove me to Terre Haute in spite of the cold in a little open carriage to avoid spending twenty francs for the stage. I hardly

³⁹ A Mère Marie, 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁰ Madeleine served the Bishops faithfully for eighteen years. Her gravestone in the Vincennes cemetery bears the following inscription: "Magdelene Berthelot, Virgin of the Third Order of Charity. Died March 9, 1859, aged 48 years."

⁴¹ *An Apostolic Woman*, pp. 206, 207.

⁴² Mère Protet à Mère Marie. S.M.W.A.

⁴³ A M. Martin, Corpus Christi, 1841. S.M.W.A.

dared say how hungry I was for he always fasts when travelling. During the two days of our journey I was under the influence of his almost uninterrupted silence. He had a good opportunity to judge of my capacity for when the road became too bad, he walked and left me to drive. . . . Never in my life was I more stupid, more helpless than those two days, but he never gave the slightest sign of impatience.

Absorbed in mournful thoughts the Bishop was oblivious of the delicate young religious half fainting probably from hunger who tried to guide the horse around the stumps and mudholes of a pioneer road while he trudged in complete silence through the woods at her side.

At last, Mother, on the fifteenth of November of the year 1841 at seven o'clock in the evening I heard in the midst of the forest the bell of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. My heart began to beat, and tears rushed to my eyes. Sister Theodore before embracing me led me to the chapel, and there at the feet of Jesus in the Eucharist I offered to God the rest of my life.⁴⁴

The long voyage with its sufferings and dangers was over, and the little Community welcomed, as she said, with a true Breton welcome the worn and weary traveller the frail young nun, who after their holy and intrepid Foundress was probably the greatest gift God ever gave to the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. As Irma herself said, "Sorrow has mysteries and abysses like the sea. How many sinking into its depths believe themselves condemned to certain death but return with pearls and corals in their hands."⁴⁵

Next day Sister Saint Francis Xavier visited the *pensionnat*. No doubt Mother Theodore walked with her through the trees across the little bridge over the brook past Father Parret's house to the handsome little building now completed in which the Sisters had two months before embarked bravely upon their second school year.

I went to see the children of our school, this American neighbor that I used to love so much, she wrote to her family. The dear little girls were pleased to see me, but assuredly not so much as I was to see them. . . . More than half our children are not baptized, she said regretfully. The predominant trait of their character is pride and independence, but when their hearts are gained, they will suffer anything to prove their devotedness.⁴⁶

The American character was already an open book to the observant French Sisters. That the children were charmed with this lovable young Sister admitted no uncertainty. They gathered round her with the quick demonstrativeness of American children.

The children according to the custom of their country approached to caress me, and one asked my permission to kiss me. [The situation was becoming embarrassing. Such evidences of affection upon such short notice were more than she had anticipated]. The moment was critical. I lifted my heart to Mary, and then I answered this poor little one that I liked them all very much. . . . I visited the classes which Sister Basilide teaches so well. Poor Basilide, I hardly recognized her, she is so thin and changed! Ah, my Mother, you were right to ask your daughters whether they had measured the length and breadth of their cross.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ A Mère Marie, 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁵ *Life and Letters of Sister St. Francis Xavier*, p. 173.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ A Mère Marie, 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

Ten days passed, and hardly had Sister Saint Francis Xavier become acquainted with her surroundings when Father Buteux arrived with a new postulant. Bishop de la Hailandière, who was prolonging his stay at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, gave the new arrival to Irma's care to assist in introducing her to the religious life, as it were, by making her acquainted with the hours of the different duties and the customs of the house.

My very dear Sister Eudoxie, wrote Irma to the mistress of novices at Ruillé, I said a Hail Mary near the statue of our Blessed Mother before coming to write to you again to bless God with me. I am writing among all these postulants of Indiana, who seem to me to be your daughters also as they are conducted by the same way. . . . God has opened Sister Theodore's eyes to the nothingness of what are called brilliant subjects in community. She has too great need of God and of finding obedient and devoted daughters to desire those who are filled with esteem of this world. . . . Her novices for the most part have not been chosen from any other class than that from which Jesus drew His apostles. Three days ago however one arrived who externally has everything. Monseigneur has charged me to make her feel at home, but I am praying with so good a heart to Saint Joseph to dismiss her if she is not suitable, that I hope if he keeps her, she will be a good religious.⁴⁸

Eleanor Bailly was certainly humanly speaking a brilliant subject and a great acquisition for the struggling Community. Educated in Detroit and in Canada both in French and English and skilled as a musician, she had received advantages comparable to the best which America offered in her time. Tall and graceful with the peculiar soft voice characteristic of the Canadian girls of mixed race, she at once manifested gifts of intellect and judgment which destined her from her entrance to render services of the first value.

Eleanor Cecilia Kinzie Bailly was the third daughter of Joseph Aubert de Gaspé Bailly de Messein, a Canadian fur magnate of distinguished French family, and Marie Le Fèvre de la Vigne, his legitimate wife. The trail of sorrow that often pursues interracial marriages had crossed Eleanor Bailly's history. Her mother was a member of the Ottawa tribe of Indians. The daughter of a similar French Indian marriage, Marie Le Fèvre with her mother and her younger sister were driven from their home on the Rivière des Raisins, now Monroe, Michigan, by her father's family after his death. The mother, embittered by her wrongs, returned to her Ottawa people and to the pagan serpent cult practiced in her tribe. Marie Le Fèvre was later forced into a pagan marriage with a powerful medicine man and sorcerer of mixed Ottawa and Eurasian blood named de la Vigne. He and his family were during the War of 1812 among the fiercest leaders of the raids against the Americans. But Marie Le Fèvre retained her Christian aspirations and training and she availed herself of the tribal privilege of buying back her freedom. She was living thus at the famous Ottawa Indian village of Arbre Croche or Crooked Tree on the present site of Harbor Springs, Michigan, near Petoskey and about thirty miles south of the old fur trading emporium of Mackinac, when she met Joseph Bailly. He, too, had separated from his former Indian companion on account of her obstinate devotion to the degraded pagan cult practiced in her tribe.

⁴⁸ 28 novembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

Marie Le Fèvre in her youth had but few of the Indian traits or sentiments, and was known as the most beautiful woman of the Northwest, "the Lily of the Lakes." In that remote time and place Church legislation upon marriage permitted, as it still does under certain circumstances, the contracting parties to administer the sacrament of matrimony to each other awaiting the priest's blessing at the earliest future opportunity.⁴⁹ Many Catholic pioneer marriages were of this sort, and Bishop Saint-Palais later strictly forbade the missionaries to cast any reflection upon them. Joseph Bailly and Marie Le Fèvre were married in 1810 at Mackinac, and their marriage received the Church sanction in 1811. Madame Bailly was of great assistance to her husband in his business.

After a successful career in the fur trade at numerous points in Michigan and Indiana, the family located in 1822 on the banks of the Little Calumet River in the heart of the Indian country near the present town of Chesterton, Indiana. His fur trading operations extended as far north as Mackinac, through the Wabash country, and south as far as Baton Rouge. Even from the far West the Indians brought pelts to his trading station, and his agents plied the forests with profits running to half a million dollars in a single season. Only the priceless Indiana hardwood forests stretching away south and east surpassed in value the rich furs of this prolific district. The highly prized beaver, red and silver fox, black bear, otter, wolverine, mink, and lynx thronged the woods, with smaller animals also in abundance, raccoons, muskrats, and squirrels, all of fixed value over the trader's counter if moth free, regardless of size. Bailly's trading post was centrally located on the old Sac or Sauk Indian Trail winding round the lower border of Lake Michigan and running west to Joliet and farther on to Omaha. The Allen Trail came up from the Wabash region to the south. Over these tribal highways thronged the French *coureurs de bois* and traders, Indians on the hunt or the war party, scouts and troops from Fort Dearborn on foot or on horseback. From 1803 Joseph Bailly's fur business had taken on immense proportions. Its peak had passed, however, on his arrival in Indiana, and it declined during the subsequent period till his death in 1835.

For eleven years the Bailly family were the only white colonists in the entire Calumet area. Theirs was the pioneer settlement and long the only one in the entire region of northern Indiana. Here the Bailly children passed their childhood, playing with the children of the copper-colored natives and learning to read and write.⁵⁰ They later were sent with the Beaubien children from Chicago to Isaac McCoy's Baptist mission school, called Carey, located first at Fort Wayne in 1820, later at Niles, Michigan. Bailly's only son died there in 1829 at the age of ten years. The Pokegan Indians loyally refused to frequent McCoy's school on account of its Baptist teaching, but in default of other schools, Joseph Bailly, despite Father Badin's disapproval, sent his children there, chaperoned by their

⁴⁹ Aloysius Brown, Mother Anastasie's father, officiated at marriages in the priest's absence at the North Arm. She used in her old age to say to a group of Sisters interested in the story of pioneer days, "My father married his daughter." After the consternation had subsided a little, she would continue with an arch smile, "to somebody else."

⁵⁰ John O. Bowers, *The Old Bailly Homestead* (Gary, Indiana, 1922).

half-sister, Theresa de la Vigne, who saw that they dutifully heard one another's catechism.

In the winter the Ottawa Indians from Michigan came south for their annual deer hunt. Each year the tribe camped in the old white oak grove near the Baillys' trading post which counted eight cabins in 1833. In the summer the region was a regular haunt of the Potawatomi tribe of which the Ottawas, with whom Madame Bailly had made her home, were an offshoot, and to which they were linked by kindred. Madame Bailly herself was called "Aunt" by the children of the well-known Ottawa chief-tain Shabane. The principal Ottawa village was for years at Arbre Croche in Michigan.

Eleanor Bailly had been born at Mackinac, June 2, 1815. Her early years were spent there and at her father's trading post on the Saint Joseph River. She was seven years old when he established himself permanently at the Bailly Homestead on the Calumet in Indiana in 1822. After leaving the Carey mission, the sisters went yearly to school to Canada and Detroit, where they made their First Communion and were confirmed. Their education finished at Detroit, they mingled with the social life of Chicago with the Beaubiens, Kinzies, and others. The Bailly sisters were beautiful, highly intelligent, cultured, and refined. Their father had accumulated a library of two or three hundred volumes, which was unusual for the times. After the district began to be opened up for white settlement in 1831, the old eighteen-inch Indian trail became a mail route. About this time Joseph Bailly laid out a town on the Calumet to be called Baillytown, with streets named for his daughters, Esther, Rose, Eleanor, and Hortense, but the project failed on his death in 1835. Esther, the eldest, married John H. Whistler, grandson of the builder of Fort Dearborn, and a cousin of James Abbott McNeil Whistler, the famous artist; and Rose Bailly on November 13, 1841, married Francis Howe, a Chicago civil engineer.

After a series of disasters during which Bailly was arrested as a spy by American cavalry in 1814, the family had devoted themselves by vow to missionary work among the Indians. Madame Bailly's promise also included a return to Indian dress and the blanket, which she wore till her death in 1866.⁶¹ She spoke only her native Ottawa dialect, and could understand French only when it was spoken slowly. Bailly himself translated the old Royaumeont French Bible history one winter for the Indians orally in the homestead living room and later made a written translation, which is still extant, of the entire New Testament into Potawatomi. Originally dependent upon Detroit, the homestead became a recognized church station or regular stopping place for the missionaries en route to and from Chicago. The first Mass was celebrated there by the veteran missionary, Father Badin, at that time in charge of the Potawatomi mission on the Saint Joseph River. One of Father Badin's letters is written from the Bailly Homestead:

I am staying in the cabin of an old Canadian who is married to an Indian. He is the only white resident of the country and has been a trader here for thirty-eight

⁶¹ Frances Howe, *Story of a French Homestead in the Old Northwest* (Nitschke Brothers, Columbus, Ohio, 1907), p. 37.

years. . . . They [the Americans] have deceived the poor Indians and accepted eighteen hundred and twenty acres, which they offered in order to have Catholic priests, and the land was given to an establishment called Carey Mission for a celebrated minister who was the first to found Bible societies and the missions of his sect in India.⁵²

Father John Guéguen, one of Bishop de la Hailandière's recruits of 1839, was sent by the Bishop to Joliet and afterwards to Chicago, and he and Mr. Saint Palace, as the Americans called him, often said Mass at the Bailly Homestead. The historians of Porter County tell us that Father de Saint-Palais "on his arrival at Bailly's settlement . . . was greeted by a vast concourse of Indians in whose presence he officiated at the solemn sacrifice of the Mass."⁵³ On these occasions the homestead parlor became the sacristy, and the confessions were heard there; in the dining room Mass was said by Fathers Badin and Guéguen upon the dining room table, by Father de Saint-Palais, who was taller, upon the grand piano. No churches or chapels were ever erected by the missionaries in the Indian country.

Two pages from the family history by Mother Cecilia's niece, Frances Howe, give a graphic picture of the environment from which Eleanor Bailly came to the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on November 25, 1841, just after her sister Rose's marriage. The first belongs to a period just previous to Joseph Bailly's death in 1835, when Eleanor was about twenty, just before the Potawatomi tribe migrated westward. It details the gathering for one of the intertribal powwows which drew the Indians in general assembly at stated times, and was viewed by the Bailly family from the Homestead front porch:

. . . The wide lawn in front of this porch was the scene of all the homestead activities. . . . There too was the Indian trail, a deep wide rut made by centuries of pacing feet, which traveling Indians never forsook for white men's roads, but always used in all their comings and goings. The warriors of a tribe in full form, in a stately single file procession, always made a showy pageant, but the most brilliant array of savage glory ever witnessed here or perhaps anywhere was on an occasion when all the Wisconsin and Minnesota Indians passed by, arrayed as if for battle, on their way to some general meeting near Detroit, and, I believe, across the line in Canada.

First came the Menominees, then the Winnebagoes, then the Foxes, divided into bands according to their totems, and attired in all their bravery. The single file passed on in perfect silence and unbroken order, not one looking either to the right or to the left, one uniform steady stride, not varying one inch one from another.

This part of the procession the family viewed from the verandah without fear, but when the servants whispered to Grandfather, "These are the last band of Foxes, the Dacotahs are the next," the ladies stepped quietly into the house where the heavy shutters in the lower story were already closed and bolted . . . for the Dacotahs, as the Sioux and Sauks were called by the other Indians, were tribes not respecting women.

The Dacotahs however formed the grandest part of the pageant; their paint was more brilliant, the war bonnets more expensive, and the display of arms unique. Feminine curiosity peered through crevices in the window shades at the fine stalwart figures of tall, lithe, athletic warriors of most commanding appearance.

⁵² *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, vol. 6, p. 154.

⁵³ Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter County, Indiana*, vol. 1, p. 15.

Each warrior's elegant blanket, passing under one arm and over the shoulder of the other arm, was fastened together by a shoulderpiece of burnished silver, bows and arrows hung at their backs, one hand grasped a bunch of javelins, and the other balanced a rifle slung over the shoulder.

When the last Dacotah had crossed the river and disappeared into the oak woods, which received the trail into its glades, there was a sensation of profound relief felt by all who had seen the unbroken line of warriors of all these tribes passing in a steady stream for two days and a half.⁵⁴

The second page is contributed by the veteran missionary, Father Guéguen, when as a young priest in 1840 on his way to Chicago, he stopped to say Mass at the Bailly Homestead:

All this happened when I first came to America. . . . I had been travelling for several days . . . when unexpectedly I saw a house upon a hill as we were crossing a bridge over a very pretty stream. . . . Soon a neat, pretty little Frenchwoman came out of the door and came down the garden path; she opened the picket gate and closed it behind her as she stepped out.

"I am told," she said, "that a priest wishes to stop here for the night. Have you letters?"

For reply I showed my authorization, and also my letter of introduction from the Bishop of Detroit. She read my authorization half aloud. I noticed she pronounced the Latin correctly and seemed to understand what she was reading; then she read the Bishop's letter and when she had finished, she said, "It is all correct. I know the Bishop's handwriting, and I also recognize the form and the handwriting of the authorization. We are seeing them quite often now." Then she flung the gate wide open and making a very reverent curtsy, begged me to dismount and enter the house. I did feel queer. I had just come from France where the feeling among the clergy against women was at its height, and to have a woman examine my authorization! . . . I saw a tall gentleman with a decidedly military bearing come out of the house. I knew at once that he was the master. . . . He spoke to me in French very fluently but in a peculiar dialect which I had never heard but which I readily understood. . . . I looked out of one window and then out of another, found the scenery very pleasing, but the effect of the groves round the premises was to make me feel that I must be hundreds of miles away from every other human habitation. Soon I saw servants on horseback come around to the front. Mr. Whistler went out and gave them some orders. They galloped off in different directions. . . .

After supper Mrs. Whistler asked me if I was too tired to speak to some persons who would be glad to go to Holy Communion the next day. Her husband and some of the servants had been around to all the Catholics in the neighborhood. Next morning when I came downstairs Mrs. Whistler asked me what I would use as an altar, her dining table or the piano. I chose the former. She brought a beautiful fine damask tablecloth and spread it over the table, one of those old drop-leaf tables . . . then she laid a long linen towel on the top, and bowing to me very respectfully and gracefully, she left the room. . . . Mrs. Whistler came in and told me that there were some Indians who wanted to go to confession. I told her that would be impossible as I did not know one word of their language. She told me that they would confess through interpretation and that she would act as interpreter. I was startled, and I suppose I showed it, for she told me to have no fear, that it was quite customary, that she was a regularly authorized interpreter and well used to the task, so I consented. She certainly was used to it and was so very unobtrusive that I hardly realized I was not speaking to them directly, and after it was all over, she seemed to forget all about it as readily as any priest.

Before Mass began, she begged me to speak a few words to the people, who

⁵⁴ Frances Howe, *Story of a French Homestead in the Old Northwest*, pp. 97-98.

seldom had a chance to hear the Word of God and who, therefore, would be glad of a little discourse. There was quite a little crowd. The parlor was full, so full that Mr. Whistler stood in the hall and heard Mass through the doorway. The Indians knelt together in one corner, and the French were in family groups. When the time came, I turned to the congregation and read the lesson of the previous Sunday, and then I got another surprise; as soon as I began to read, Mrs. Whistler stood up and began speaking in a language which I knew must be Indian. She spoke in low monotones, and I noticed that the Indians who kept their eyes fixed on me, were understanding what I was saying. I began to preach, and Mrs. Whistler continued her low monotones, which were no disturbance to me any more than the rustling of the leaves and the singing of the birds outside. I noticed the Indians were very much pleased, and as I noticed their pleasure, I prolonged my discourse, enlarging upon certain points and extending ideas, and still Mrs. Whistler went on, never pausing, always seeming to find a word for mine until the close.

After Mass came a quarter of an hour of silence. You don't know how strange it is to find the silence of church in a family home . . . but to have all the household sounds hushed absolutely at the bidding of devotion seemed marvelous. When my devotions were finished . . . a number of young Indian girls came in, each one with a plate, knife, and fork, cup and saucer and a napkin which they set down in the proper places, then they went out and returned, one with the tray of coffee service and the others with platters and dishes of food which they placed properly. I did wonder to see these savage maidens setting a table as correctly and neatly as any well-trained European servants could do it.

Mrs. Whistler came in and took her place at the table. Mr. Whistler put me in the post of honor. . . . Then I saw that my horse was ready, and my guide was there too. Mr. Whistler's horse was there too. He mounted it and went on with us for a long distance to show us the best and the shortest roads. . . . I found out that although he called himself a Catholic and believed he was one, he really was a Jansenist. He was a very good man, very sincere and upright.

Well, I had a great deal to think about all day. I had had a good many surprises in a very short time. I had just come from France where the regulations against women having anything whatever to do with Divine service were most strictly enforced, with excessive rigor, and here a woman had inspected my authorization, had helped me hear confessions, and made my sermon reach the minds of all my hearers. Yet, what of it? I had done missionary work such as I had never dreamed of, and there and then I came to a conclusion which I turned into a fixed resolution, that I would never oppose any American custom, no matter how strange and peculiar it might be, provided it was not opposed to the Ten Commandments and did not contradict the teaching of the Gospel, for my recent experiences made me feel that that would be the way to do the most good.⁵⁵

Despite her gifts Eleanor Bailly was received only tentatively in the beginning by Mother Theodore. The great and seemingly urgent need at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was for educated English-speaking novices, especially since Mother Mary had shown herself deaf to their appeals for additional help from France, but Mother Theodore was resolved to accept no one in whom the religious spirit was lacking, no matter how richly endowed otherwise. The Bishop had written, "Miss Bailly has decided to come. . . . She will be of great assistance to you, she has so much simplicity."⁵⁶ Mother Theodore's first impression of her new postulant is found in a letter to Ruillé:

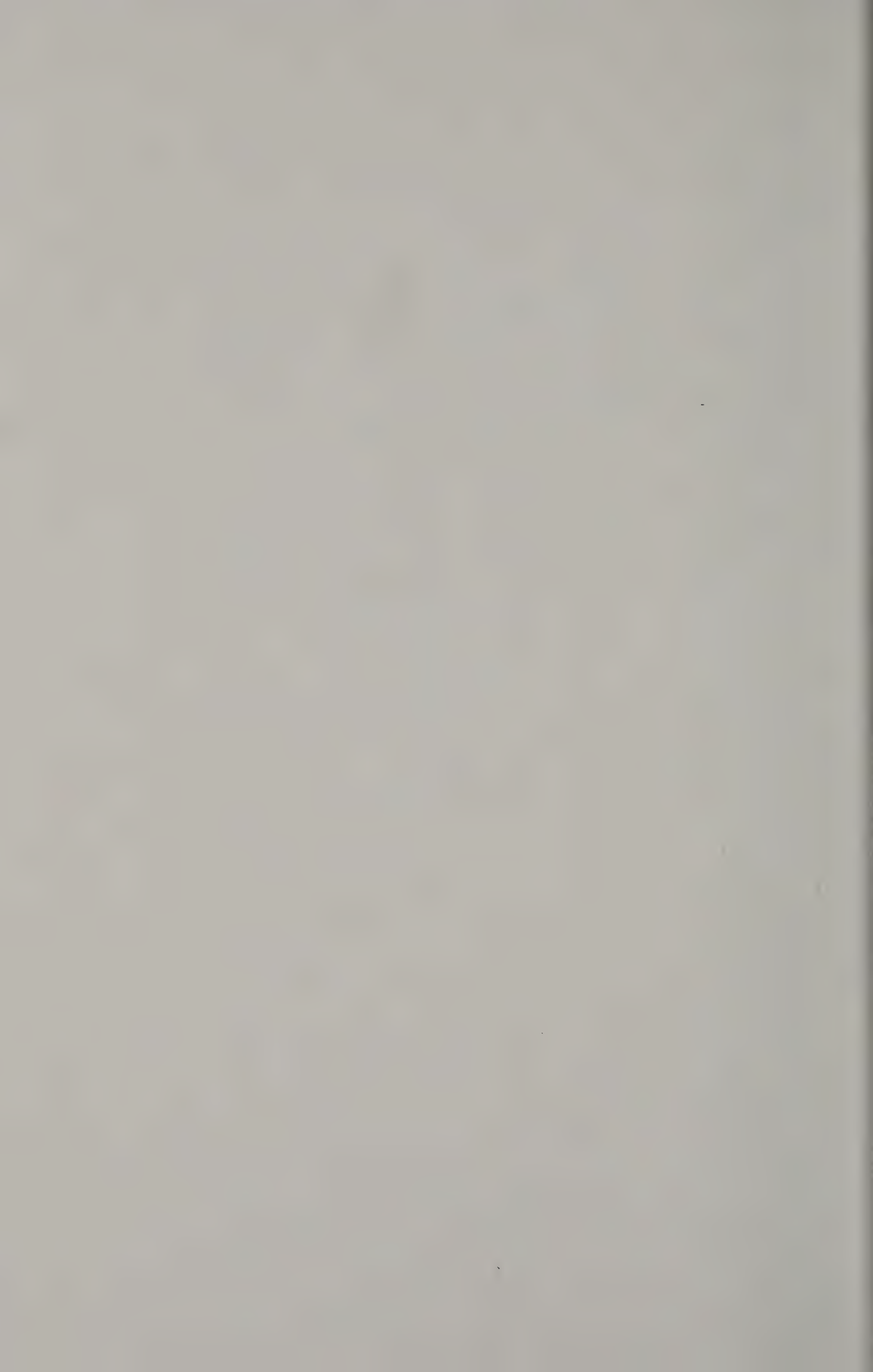
⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-132.

⁵⁶ 31 octobre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

A new postulant arrived last week who appears desirable. She alone could serve as a proof that the Lord has His elect everywhere and that He watches over them. She seems only half civilized, but she has received the direction of the Holy Spirit. She has been brilliantly educated and knows vocal and instrumental music, which pleases Monseigneur greatly. I do not know whether she will remain, as I wish only those whom God would choose, and in spite of all her fine qualities, we would not receive her if as to virtue she were not suitable. Mr. Perché, a priest whom I met at Soulaines, is to bring us another this week. You see that our little family is growing. O Mother, if we only had a mistress to form them!⁶⁷

Arriving at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at almost the same time, and later closely associated in responsible positions in the Community for years, Irma Le Fer de la Motte and Eleanor Bailly may perhaps better be contrasted than compared. Physically they were disparate. Irma's slight form and frail health, her frequent illnesses and bodily weakness were a handicap unknown to the vigorous Eleanor, whose resilient frame had been hardened by the exposure and privations of the frontier. She was destined to be an octogenarian while the fragile Irma lived but fourteen years in Indiana. The exquisite beauty of person of the latter had little in common with the darker complexioned though handsome Eleanor. Intellectually too they differed greatly. Though equal perhaps in opportunities Sister Mary Cecilia never showed the literary qualities, the wit, and taste so apparent in Sister Saint Francis Xavier's letters, although she was probably a better teacher and a more orderly and efficient superior. In the realm of the spiritual life Mother Theodore is authority for the statement that in her day Sister Saint Francis Xavier had no peer at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Sister Mary Cecilia, though in her French-Canadian ancestry and mixed blood, differing considerably from the Kentuckians, who were second or third generation Americans of English stock, was at one with them, as Mother Theodore so often remarked, in lacking the tender piety of the French. Both of these highly gifted young Sisters however merited and won the respect and the love of their discerning Superior, and both were destined to accomplish much good in Indiana.

⁶⁷ A Mère Marie, 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.



PART III

THE YEARS OF SORROW

1841-1847

CHAPTER VII

GROWTH OF THE COMMUNITY (Continued)

"To fulfill our vocation in America,
we must be saints."

MOTHER THEODORE

DURING all the months when Sister Saint Francis Xavier's missionary vocation was under advisement in France and earlier on his return to Vincennes from Europe as Bishop in November, 1839, Monseigneur de la Hailandière's thoughts and aspirations, like Bishop Bruté's before him, had turned insistently upon completing the poor shack of a cathedral which had stood beside the Wabash for years unfinished and in almost the same state as Father Champomier had left it in utter discouragement in 1831. The church finances were still in charge of the trustees. In 1837 the minutes¹ show that Father de la Hailandière, as president of the board, had sketched for the members his plans for extensive improvements, a bell tower, a free school properly endowed, and other buildings necessary for an episcopal see. The trustees must have listened with mild surprise to his grandiose schemes for the poor little frontier town.

During 1840 as Bishop, Monseigneur de la Hailandière devoted himself unremittingly to the work on the cathedral. Bishop Bruté had contributed a thousand dollars toward plastering the edifice, but even this gift, munificent for the times, did not rouse the poor and apathetic Canadians of Vincennes to any concerted effort to finish the tottering building. The Bishop had written before his death that the wood for the tower was cut at Saint Francisville and ready to float down the "proud Wabash," but when Mother Theodore saw the cathedral first in October, 1840, she was shocked by its broken windows, its ruinous chimney which passed for an incipient spire, and its general air of destitution.

As the parishioners still were able to contribute little or nothing, they agreed at last in October, 1840, to hand over to the Bishop and his successors the church and its property in order that he might finish the cathedral himself with funds collected in Europe and administer it at his discretion. A deed of trust was drawn to this effect by the congregation. In 1841 his hands now freed, the Bishop built the library, the sacristies, and the rectory, and urged forward the work on the cathedral. Several young men, skilled artisans, eventually followed him from France, among them Jacques Roquet from Saint-Servan and Prosper Eluère from Rennes, also the carpenter and builder Jean-Marie Marcile, and upon them he leaned heavily then and later for his building operations both at Vincennes and at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The sanctuary wall of the cathedral had collapsed and had to be rebuilt, and in August, 1840, Bishop Bruté's remains were transferred to the crypt prepared for them, where they were buried in Our Lady's Chapel, at the foot of a plain but beauti-

¹ Vincennes Old Cathedral Archives.

ful statue of her which Bishop Bruté had secured in France, midway between the statue and the main altar, where he still lies. This chapel was completed and blessed the following January. By April, 1841, considerable progress on the cathedral had been made, and the Bishop was making plans for its consecration.

Our church is going forward, he wrote. A workman from Saint-Servan is building the steeple. In three or four months we shall be able to have the consecration. That ceremony will be preceded or followed by an ecclesiastical retreat, and a synod will also find its place.²

The date of the ceremony was fixed for August 8, the priests' retreat to precede and a mission for the people to follow it,³ but the idea of a synod was perforce abandoned from lack of time to prepare for it. The Bishop had written as early as June to ask prayers at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for the retreat and the mission. Inviting the Sisters to be present at the consecration, he later referred to the occasion in a letter to Mother Theodore as "that very great day of which you will never in your life have seen the equal."⁴ Elaborate plans were made for the ceremonies. He wished several Sisters to be present. With his usual minute directions he wrote: "To avoid expense take the little carriage and the smallest possible amount of baggage. Four can be seated in the carriage, and if one of you can drive, have Troné or Julian Brassier on horseback to accompany you."⁵ Eventually only two Sisters could be spared.

Mother Theodore must set affairs in order on the farm before she could leave. Under her direction, the Brassiers had cut and gathered the hay in July, the new barn for storing the harvest was finished, and the Brassier family installed in the recently built farmhouse. School had also been closed. In the torrid August weather, very different from cool, foggy Brittany, with the burning sun's rays of her first American summer beating down upon them, Mother Theodore and her American novice, Sister Aloysia, who had been clothed in the religious habit since the feast of the Purification in the preceding February, set out in the Bishop's little carriage for the two-day drive to Vincennes. Their heavy lined habits and woolen hose required by the rule and unnoticed in the temperate French summers must have been a source of acute suffering in America when the temperature hovered around one hundred.

The finished cathedral justified the plans and the work of Bishop de la Hailandière. It compared favorably with the best ecclesiastical edifices of the time in the West. Like most of the early churches in America, the cathedral is classical in its general outlines, and reminiscent of the Bardstown Cathedral, but without the massive columned vestibule seen in the Baltimore, Saint Louis, and other early cathedrals. The tower proved to be svelte and graceful, recalling, as one observer has said, the earlier spires of Sir Christopher Wren. It dominated, as it does today, the somnolent old town on the Wabash, and from its upper windows pealed forth the silver music of Gibault's little "Liberty Bell of the Northwest,"

² A Rev. A. Martin, 29 avril, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³ *Ibid.*, Corpus Christi, 1841.

⁴ 25 juillet, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁵ 3 juillet, 1841. Probably should be 3 août, 1841. S.M.W.A.

which had called the *habitants* to swear allegiance to the American flag in 1779. Newspaper accounts of the time referred also to one serious disadvantage, the unsatisfactory acoustics of the interior.

The ceremonies were indeed impressive. The two Kentucky Jesuits, Father Louis Petit and Father John Larkin from Saint Mary's College in Marion County across the Ohio River, explained to the assembled people from outdoor elevated pulpits the ceremonies going on within the cathedral. Everything was in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion.

Sister Aloysia and I came to Vincennes for the consecration of the cathedral, which took place yesterday [Sunday], wrote Mother Theodore to France. This is a ceremony of happiness for all Christian hearts, but especially for our good and worthy Bishop who officiated. Monsignor Purcell, Bishop of Cincinnati, celebrated the Mass and delivered a fine discourse in English, which everyone found charming. He preached a second time in the evening and again this morning at the memorial service for Monseigneur Bruté. This Bishop of Cincinnati is another St. Louis de Gonzague. If you knew, my good Mother, what virtues one finds in these ecclesiastics! What real men our missionaries are! How small I feel in the presence of these men of God!

I met here Father Petit, a Jesuit, who gave us a retreat at Ruillé when I arrived there eighteen years ago. I experienced real joy in seeing this good Father. . . .⁶

During this visit to Vincennes, Mother Theodore made the acquaintance through Father Martin of Father Julian Benoit, a priest of the diocese, who had accompanied Bishop Bruté to America in 1836 and had been pastor at Fort Wayne for over a year. He was about to leave for France on a special business mission entrusted to him by the Bishop, and as he expected to go to Ruillé, Mother Theodore recommended him to Mother Mary:

Last night Mr. Martin introduced me to Abbé Benoit, who is leaving for France and who intends going to see you. Oh, how happy he is! Why cannot I follow him? But what have I said? No, Mother, I desire no longer anything, I think, but the accomplishment of God's Will. This good missionary will go to Ruillé. Have the kindness to receive him as the messenger of Monseigneur, as he is charged with important business for the diocese. Otherwise I am not acquainted with him. If I had foreseen that we were to have so good an opportunity, I would have sent you some little nothings of our woods to remind you of us.⁷

The principal object of Father Benoit's voyage to France was to secure the fifty thousand francs promised to Bishop de la Hailandière by Father Ignace Mertian of Strasbourg for the Sisters' establishment in America. Father Mertian had given up all thought of paying this sum when the Sisters were not located at Sainte Marie, and pressure was now being brought to bear upon him to alter his decision:

I went straight to Strasbourg, wrote Father Benoit from Lyons in December, 1841, where I took care of the affair of the fifty thousand francs. The old gentleman wished by no means to hear of it in spite of all the means of persuasion that I could employ. . . . Later I saw the coadjutor, finding him but little disposed. . . . He was not able to occupy himself with my affair, and all my work was confined to a memorandum supported by M. Mertian's letters for justifying documents.⁸

⁶ A Mère Marie, 9 août, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Lyon, 17 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

A later decision in response to an appeal to the ecclesiastical authorities in Strasbourg was however

. . . entirely in Monseigneur's favor. The result I cannot foresee. . . . Good old M. Mertian . . . does not wish any more to be said to him of this affair. . . . The only resource which remains to us are his timorous conscience, his charity, and the difficulty that he might repent appearing before God without having submitted to the new decision.⁹

Eventually the good old priest changed his mind and gave Father Buteux two hundred dollars "for his church at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods;" later he directed his nephew Joseph Picquet, manager of the *Colonie des Frères*, at Sainte Marie, to pay ten thousand dollars to the Bishop at Vincennes, which amply reimbursed him for the expense he had incurred for the site and the buildings at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Mother Theodore was obliged to hurry back to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as the second annual retreat was to open at once, to be given by Father Martin as the first one in November, 1840, after their establishment in the lately purchased Thralls house had been. At that time Father Martin had been the director, and Father Buteux had been appointed to assist him. Now however that the chaplain had been removed to Logansport, young Father Antoine Parret was temporarily named confessor to the Community and assisted in this capacity during the exercises. For eight days a pall of silence and prayer descended upon the little convent in the forest. Despite their quiet and retirement, the Sisters celebrated with great joy the feast of the Assumption, one of the three special patronal feasts of the Community and one of the greatest festivals of the year. The early French missionaries had an ardent devotion to this prerogative of our Lady, and many of the first churches and cathedrals in Indiana, Maryland, Kentucky, and elsewhere were dedicated to her Assumption. Mother Theodore would have been happy to signalize the occasion by the closing of the retreat and the ceremonies of reception and profession as was an established custom later, but this year the consecration of the Vincennes Cathedral had postponed the opening of the exercises, and in succeeding years when the busy missionaries acted as retreat masters, their time and convenience were the first consideration.

At the close of the retreat on August 19 Sister Agnes received the religious habit. The Bishop, assisted by the Vicar General, Father Martin, officiated at the ceremony of reception and renovation of vows. Only two years earlier he had been at Ruillé on that very day in quest of Sisters for his mission, and the Sisters too had all assisted at the elaborate ceremonies there when nineteen young Frenchwomen were received and twenty professed. The Bishop welcomed a respite after the strenuous labor of completing and consecrating the cathedral and as usual prolonged his stay in the quiet forest far from the difficulties and anxieties of Vincennes. His visits were frequent and were a source of great consolation.

Only eight days ago I arrived here, he wrote on another occasion, not without trouble, the last part of the road turning out to be excessively bad. In this solitude of the woods which many troubles and many consolations render dear to me, all

⁹ 25 juin, 1842. S.M.W.A.

is calm, all is well. . . . Thus the few days that I have spent here have made me forget many things. I had almost forgotten that I was a Bishop. . . . I intend to remain here several days. There is so much to do here, and I see nothing pressing at Vincennes.¹⁰

Sister Agnes, Genevieve Dakent, had been one of the group of postulants from Vincennes who had been awaiting the arrival of the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in the previous October. She had been ten months a postulant plus another month or so before the Sisters' arrival, but Mother Theodore was deeply impressed from the very beginning with the importance of proceeding slowly, and only now was the little particular council of three or four members willing to receive her as a novice. All Mother Theodore's wisest and most experienced counselors urged the absolute necessity of prayer and deliberation and care in laying the foundations of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and this policy was steadily adhered to despite many reasons for expanding rapidly. The good priests of Indiana were already looking to the new Community with the hope of having Sisters to open schools in connection with the rising Catholic congregations, but these requests could be granted only gradually. Bishop Bruté had already chosen Terre Haute and Evansville as the most promising centers for the Sisters' activities, but eventually these were among the later missions, Evansville opening only in 1853. On this point Mother Theodore's wise old friend from Soulaines, M. de la Bertaudière, wrote in July, 1841:

I have been pleased to learn that from a material standpoint your position is much improved. I am beginning to have hopes for your establishment. Your Bishop assisting you with all his power . . . you will succeed. I think however that he should not press you too much to form branches of your house before having subjects perfectly educated and formed. Often and practically always reputation means more than reality, and this reputation is oftenest won or lost by the beginnings.¹¹

After the close of the retreat and the religious reception the Sisters turned to the more prosaic task of caring for their material needs. That they had generous benefactors was evident from the gifts which arrived from time to time from Madame Parmentier and Mr. Byerley in New York and from thoughtful friends in France. The general store maintained by Samuel Crawford in Terre Haute had by this time become the Community's usual purchasing place, and Madame Parmentier's box received during the retreat was sent through this merchant. Earlier parcels according to the custom were sent in care of "H. and W. W. Williams, pork packers in Terre Haute." A later large shipment from Mr. Byerley which contained commodities hard to obtain in the backwoods, a barrel of coffee, another of Spanish wine, and five hundred pounds of white sugar, supplied their needs for some time. Part of the wine, with her usual generosity, Mother Theodore sent to the Bishop and part of the sugar to the Sisters of Charity in Vincennes. The remainder of the wine she sold to defray their pressing current expenses. For the moment the Bishop could do nothing for them. "I regret that

¹⁰ A. M. Martin, n. d. S.M.W.A.

¹¹ Soulaines, 20 juillet, 1841. S.M.W.A.

I cannot help you," he wrote, "but I have in all just one dollar. I am waiting for more."¹²

The farm, however, was developing rapidly into such a condition that they would soon be self-sustaining. Both before and after the retreat during the summer months the harvest and the heavy labor of the farm had been a source of imperative concern. The weather had been propitious, and incredible as it may seem, the agricultural efforts of this little group of foreign women, religious too and removed by their very vocation from the experience so vitally necessary in agriculture, had proved successful. The crops on the cleared part of their domain were proving excellent. The Brassier family, father and sons, had been occupied all winter in bringing additional acres into condition for cultivation. These had produced wheat and hay, which were harvested in July, and oats cut some weeks later. Like most of the pioneer farmers, Joseph Thralls was a distiller in addition to his farming operations and had put up a still on the place and a mill for grinding his corn. The meadow surrounding the mill was now burned over to fertilize it for hay seed. After the corn was gathered, the Sisters helped in the heavy work of shucking it.

The apple trees in the little orchard Thralls had planted were all yielding a generous return for the effort expended on them. The vegetable garden, too, had been successful and aroused a deep interest among their friends in France.

You have wild bees in your forest, wrote M. de la Bertaudière from Soulaines, where he was a large vinegrower and cultivator, . . . and those large wild turkeys on the spit. I shut my eyes and imagine I see your convent and you, Sister, with your blue glasses, managing everything with a fine garden beginning. Apropos of your garden I am sending you seeds of everything we have, and others which we have not procured at Angers. I trust they will succeed, but—a gardener and again the hard winters, two items! The first you lack, the second you do not lack. May you succeed and when you are eating the fruits think of the giver.¹³

The outdoor labor of gathering the fruit occupied the postulants till late in the fall. At the end of October wheat was sown, and a little later Julian Brassier left the employ of the Community attracted by better prospects in New Orleans. The others followed him, and eventually the entire family left Saint Mary's. A farmer to take charge of the now considerable acreage was an immediate necessity, and for a time Theodore Troné, a young man from Vincennes, was employed.

The summer labors over, time still remained before cold weather to undertake the necessary alterations and repairs upon the convent. On September 8 a little bell, which the Bishop had sent them, was hung upon the convent to peal forth thrice daily over the forest the blessed sound of the Angelus and mark the time of Community exercises. The Thralls house was still painfully crowded, and it was decided to enclose the outdoor porch on the south side as a new and permanent chapel. Sixteen persons trying to lead a religious life in one room and a loft seemed an all sufficient reason for finishing it. On October 18 Mother Theodore noted in her diary that work had begun upon the ceiling of the

¹² 31 octobre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

¹³ 20 juillet, 1841. S.M.W.A.

chapel, and on the next day the first stone of the two wings to be added to the convent was laid. The Bishop was planning to bless the chapel and give the religious habit to two or three postulants on his next visit to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

As for the chapel, let them finish it since they have begun. It will be the better for it, but let me tell you very gently that at present I have not a single penny. Henceforth then be careful not to incur any but necessary expenses.¹⁴

Work progressed rapidly, and at the end of the month the walls of both wings were up, though the approach of winter prevented their completion before spring.

The chapel however was rushed forward. An altar more proper to be the resting place for the Blessed Sacrament than the first poor little rough table was built and painted, and on November 10, the Blessed Sacrament was installed there. The hard labor of getting all in readiness was forgotten when weary and happy the Sisters knelt at evening under the pale glow of their little tabernacle light. A space beyond and above the altar awaited their ex-voto Madonna, M. de la Bertaudière's gift, which had arrived in New York and was already on its way westward. For the present their companion statuettes of Our Lady¹⁵ and Saint Joseph¹⁶ brought from Ruillé were given places of honor near the tiny tabernacle. At the Mass celebrated by Father Buteux for the first time next morning they all received Holy Communion from the little pyx which they had seen the night they arrived in which the Blessed Sacrament was still reserved.

To fit themselves for the task of education in their new environment they knew the study of English to be a first essential. During all this time, despite their meager knowledge of it, some of their prayers and spiritual exercises were made in this still strange language. Bishop de la Hailandière had suggested that the spiritual reading be made first in French then afterwards the same matter in English. Contrary to the rule of conventual quiet, English conversation was permitted by the Bishop at all times during the day. They learned with varying success. Mother Theodore, though busily occupied and past the years of the rapid acquisition necessary for languages, made progress and could give instructions in English and converse with the postulants when Sister Saint Francis arrived at the end of their first year in America. "Sister Theodore speaks enough to understand the postulants, something Sister Saint Vincent has not been able to accomplish." It was three months before she could say the chaplet publicly. The Bishop insisted upon Mother Theodore's giving her "catechism," as it was called, in English, an absolute necessity for the American postulants, who were in general owing to pioneer conditions very poorly instructed. "Facility will come to you," he declared.

Most of the Community devotions however were still made perforce in French. These ordinary daily prayers had been published at Le Mans with the Little Office of the Sacred Heart of Mary in a small calf-bound

¹⁴ 14 octobre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

¹⁵ Lost in the conflagration of 1889.

¹⁶ Still preserved in Providence reclusium hall.

volume in 1835 by order of Bishop Bouvier.¹⁷ It included night and morning prayers, the Litany of Providence, and the long prayer to Saint Joseph. Still recited daily, these devotions were all brought by the first Sisters from Ruillé and have been the medium of precious graces to the American Sisters of Providence to this day. The Bishop had given these Community prayers to the French-American Jesuit Father Nicholas Petit to translate into English.

This Haitian-born and Baltimore-educated Jesuit was well known to some of the Sisters, who remembered his retreat at Ruillé in 1823. His visit to Saint Mary's in September, 1841, was like an answer to prayer to Mother Theodore, and it was largely owing to his representations that Father Buteux was later removed. The zealous and scholarly Jesuit, who had done yeoman service as a missionary in the diocese before Bishop Bruté's arrival, remained three days and visited every corner of the place. His experienced advice was invaluable to Mother Theodore. With Father Parret he dined twice with the pupils at the academy, the second repast prepared by the pioneer maidens themselves, who were delighted to offer him some Hoosier cookery. The precarious situation of the group of French religious in their remote forest home no doubt motivated his parting address to the Community upon the touching text, "Fear not, little flock," and years later Sister Marie Joseph recalled the deep impression made upon them and the tender love of their vocation and their Community which they drew from his encouraging words.

This gradual individual and group adjustment to their environment did not preclude a definite influence upon it. Their Community prayers were not the only treasures they had brought from France. Two precious legacies were bequeathed to the Community by the Foundress and the early Sisters. The first was an all-pervasive devotion to the Blessed Sacrament; the second, an earnest and fervent devotion to our Heavenly Queen and Mother Mary. The striking seal of Eucharistic devotion which the years have impressed deeper and deeper upon Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was no less apparent in 1840. Accustomed as they were to the splendid edifices of Catholic France, the hearts of the Sisters were broken by the miserable quarters in which they found the Blessed Sacrament on arriving at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and their first thought was to better conditions as soon as they could. No sooner were they domiciled in the Thralls house and the good farmer and his children had departed than the Sisters hastened to make it possible to remove the Blessed Sacrament from the log cabin. When they had only two rooms and a porch downstairs and the corn loft above, one room was given up to their Eucharistic Lord. During all the first winter and the harrowing days of Mother Theodore's serious and protracted illness they had only one room downstairs and the dormitory above for all living purposes; yet they never thought of returning to the first arrangement and using again the log cabin for their chapel. Later in the autumn of 1841 when the wings to the house were begun, with touching love and devotion they forgot their own well-being till their Divine Guest was first provided for.

¹⁷ *Petit Office du Sacré Cœur de Marie en Latin et en Français à l'usage des Sœurs de la Providence de Ruillé-sur-Loir, Diocèse du Mans, réimprimé avec plusieurs autres prières, par ordre de Monseigneur du Mans (Au Mans. Richelet, 1837). S.M.W.A.*

Sister Saint Francis Xavier began at once to solicit alms for the chapel from her family and friends in France, and gradually they were able to adorn it fittingly with needlework and artificial flowers of their own making and gifts from friends. The constancy with which their poor best was given for the adornment of the altar and the service of the chapel is one of the most striking notes of the early history of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Frequent Communion was rare at the time, but they had the privilege of daily Mass which, as has been noted, was the sole condition which Mother Theodore had required in making her establishment. Almost from the first also they had permission for Benediction on Sundays and Thursdays which, as they had no monstrance, was given with the little pyx in which the Blessed Sacrament had been reserved in the log chapel.

Second only to the cult of the Eucharist was the ardent and active devotion to the Mother of God which Mother Theodore brought from France. At Ruillé, the chapel at Little Providence in the fields, the cradle of the Community, and the chapel of Mother du Roscoät's Providence in the Village were both dedicated to the Community Patrons, the Holy Family; but Mary's gracious image was over the altars. In America they found that Bishop Bruté had dedicated to our Lady's Assumption the first little frame church in Vigo County, which was built on the present site of Foley Hall at Saint Mary's, and he had changed the name of the locality to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The Office of the Sacred Heart of Mary, later succeeded by the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, and the evening Rosary were among the principal spiritual exercises of the Community. The Sisters honored with special devotion from the first the little statue of the Blessed Virgin which they had brought with them from Ruillé, and Mother Theodore always attributed her recovery from the long and terrible illness of their first year in America to the intercession of Our Lady. May Devotions, which were but little known at that time, were begun, as we have seen, during the first year at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had been instrumental in introducing the Month of May in her own parish when she was still a young girl in the world; and one of the treasures of the Community is the faded diploma admitting Irma Le Fer de la Motte to the Congregation of the Children of Mary at Saint-Servan in 1836. The day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin was then as now one of the greatest feasts of the year.

Mother Theodore delighted to place all the Community activities under the protection of Mary, and she ordinarily chose her feast days to inaugurate their good works. "Our every good," she wrote, "has come to us through Mary." Their first reception and profession took place on a feast of our Blessed Mother, February 2, 1841. When at last the academy building was finished and the Sisters were able to begin their tentative boarding school, Mother Theodore chose the feast of the Visitation, July 2, 1841, for the opening. To their disappointment, it was not possible to have the house in readiness; they began therefore July 4, a Saturday, when they welcomed as a gift from our Lady their first pupil, a little Protestant girl named Mary. On September 8, 1841, their little convent bell was blessed and hung to ring out three times daily in the forest the

sweet tones of the Angelus. Another feast day of our Lady marked an event of which Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote, "I began my work with our little girls of the Academy, this loved 'American neighbor' for whom we give our lives so willingly." This was on November 21, the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin in the Temple. "It is the Blessed Virgin especially who loves and protects us," wrote Mother Theodore to Ruillé. "It was on a Saturday that we first set foot upon this land. It was on the feast of her Nativity that we received Holy Communion for the first time in America. It was from this good Mother that my life was obtained. It was on a Saturday also that in spite of ourselves, the boarding school began, and Mary was the name of the first pupil."

The little convent was already well organized. They had daily Mass in their tiny chapel, confessions on Friday, and on Sunday High Mass in Father Parret's house in which there was a little more space for the people. Sister Saint Francis Xavier voices the reaction of the Sisters: "O Mother, if you could see how poor it all is, but I assure you it is not we who should complain, it is our Jesus. No altar but a board, no incense but resin, and for tapers a little piece of candle. If only we love Him well!"¹⁸ Though Father Buteux had gone, Mass was still celebrated every third Sunday also at the North Arm and Terre Haute. As had been the case earlier in the log chapel, most of the parishioners after coming great distances could not find entrance to Father Parret's house, but on their account and also for the sake of the postulants, English was the language of the sermon and of the catechetical instruction in the afternoon at Providence.

Sister Saint Francis Xavier suffered from all this:

To be always with people one cannot understand. I assure you one must have gone through it to know the suffering it brings. During my entire voyage I found only one single person who could speak French, and that very badly . . . I live on spiritual memories, for I understand only about a fourth of what I hear. I speak much better in proportion, write passably, translate about the same.¹⁹

During her first days at Saint Mary's she "washed the dishes in that little kitchen of Nazareth open to every wind. . . . How could one keep a worldly spirit in this desert? Old trees, mud, a graveyard, but our great God in a little chapel and otherwise nothing, nothing but the cross on every side. How good you are, O my Jesus, to have brought me here."²⁰ Complete poverty awaited her certainly, but a still deeper found refuge in her heart. Her precious portfolio with all the letters of her French superiors, her piece of the True Cross, and other highly prized relics disappeared, lost in the depths of the woods during her voyage from Vincennes, and she further despoiled herself by handing over to Mother Theodore, Mother Mary's chaplet and Mother Saint Charles's veil, and to the other members of the Community Sister Eudoxie's statue of the Blessed Virgin and the chaplets which had been given her at Ruillé and in New York, gifts which were accepted by their new recipients with the deepest gratitude and emotion.

¹⁸ 26 février, 1842. S.M.W.A.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

I was very much afraid, she wrote to Ruillé, that they would not have left me any of the poverty, but more than one kind happily will still be mine. You know that in this regard it is not hard for me to keep my vows . . . but if you knew that there are places where the priests are compelled for the want of a chalice to abstain from saying Mass sometimes two years at a time, would you not knock at the doors of the rich to ask a little place to lodge a God?²¹

It was to assist the diocesan missionaries also that she began shortly after her arrival in Indiana a crusade among her relatives and friends in France for sacred vessels and altar furnishings. Some months later her brother, Abbé Alphonse Le Fer de la Motte, sent a box of articles donated by the ladies of his parish at Fougères. Among the contents of the box was the first monstrance ever used at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Blessed by the Bishop, it served for Solemn Benediction on the usual days, Sunday and Thursday. Incense too came at this time to replace the resin the Sisters had been obliged to burn, and a number of chalices from Sister Saint Francis's friend, the Holy Man of Tours, M. Léon Dupont, also to be distributed among the poor churches of Indiana. The devoted Le Fer family and their friends eventually gave two monstrances, one of which was lost in the fire of 1889. The other, a beautiful example of repoussé work in silver, is still cherished and often serves for daily Benediction in the church. Light and serviceable, its handsome embossed Eucharistic emblems, the Lamb on the book, and the wheat and grapes, combine exquisitely with the soft clouds and the angels' heads which encircle the luna.

The hard year since July, 1840, and especially the severe winter had taken its toll of the strength of the pioneer Sisters. Their second winter, that of 1841-1842, was mild, more like the equable season the Sisters were accustomed to in France, but Mother Theodore's health had been deeply undermined by her terrible illness of the previous winter. She suffered from almost continuous fever, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier describes her own health as only passable. "Sister Olympiade has grown very old, and as she has been ill, is greatly changed exteriorly." Sister Basilide, Sister Agnes, and Sister Saint Vincent had all fallen victims to the fevers common in Indiana, which when complicated with chills were so prevalent as to prostrate whole villages at a time.

It was the old time malady called the ague, malarial fever, which during all the pioneer period came back with each recurring summer. The particular species current along the Wabash and called the "Wabash ague" was the severest known²² and ten years later the Benedictines from Switzerland were warned away from fever-ridden Indiana. To escape the ravages of this obstinate malady, the first pioneers forsook the low lying tracts along the rivers seeking purer air on the bluffs. In southern Indiana the cabins of one of the first Catholic settlements clustered on the Knobs above the Ohio, and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, though not entirely immune during the early days, eventually profited by its high location far above and beyond the swampy Wabash bottom. Not till forty years later was the true cause of the malaria discovered in what the Sisters

²¹ 5 mai, 1842. S.M.W.A.

²² Kate Milner Rabb, *Tour Through Indiana in 1840* (Robert M. McBride, New York, 1920), p. 76.

thought of only as an annoying pest, the "spotted-winged swamp mosquito,"²³ which bred in incredible numbers upon the lakes and ponds and flooded bottom land and victimized the defenseless settlers. Mosquito netting they had very early, but screens were practically unknown. The Sisters had met the swarms of mosquitoes as soon as they reached the Middle West at Cincinnati, and they suffered from them patiently for many years.

All during September and early October of this year the French Sisters at Saint Mary's had been watching for the Brothers who had left France on the *Iowa*, the same ship which carried Sister Saint Francis Xavier and the colony of Sacred Heart nuns. After crossing New York and Ohio, Father Sorin and his party were welcomed at Logansport by their compatriot Father Martin. On October 8 they arrived at Terre Haute on their way down the river to Vincennes. They were accompanied by a little orphan girl, Mary Johnston, whom Father Martin was commending to Mother Theodore's care. Lonely hearts at Saint Mary's had hoped for letters and messages from France, but Father Sorin was weary from the long journey and anxious to reach their destination at Vincennes. The Bishop had had his first certain news of their coming from a French Catholic journal at the end of May. In July he had more direct information:

I have heard from Abbé Moreau, he wrote to Mother Theodore, that on July 16 four of his Brothers, Father Sorin, and three Sisters will start. . . . No doubt our dear Irma is of the number. You should write at once, I think, to Mme. Parmentier to prepare for their coming. I have already written to Mr. Frenaye. Let us try to spare them the disappointment which momentarily disconcerted you. . . . Mr. Martin offers you in the name of her father, who confided her to him when dying, a little girl to rear. She is a Catholic of about four years, and would be yours consequently to be provided with everything by you.²⁴

A later communication from Father Moreau revealed to the Bishop that, with the exception of Sister Saint Francis Xavier, no more Sisters were to be expected from Ruillé. He was deeply disappointed. "From that quarter," he wrote, "expect nothing whatever, neither Sisters nor money nor even encouragement."²⁵

At once after their arrival at Vincennes, the Brothers were domiciled at Saint Peter's, now Montgomery, Indiana, where the Bishop had a farm of one hundred and sixty acres. The locality was known as Saint Pierre, also White River and Black Oak Ridge, and here it was that the Sisters of Charity from Nazareth founded in 1832 their short-lived mission under Mother Angela Spink, whose brother lived in the vicinity. The farm, called "the old Dant grant," was located in the center of a colony of good Kentucky Catholics. The church was Father Lalumiere's first attempt at church building.²⁶ The old church record tells the story:

Simon Petit Lalumiere, C.P. [Catholic Priest] entered congregation of White River on the 22 of June, 1830. Sent by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Flaget.

²³ Anopheles.

²⁴ 26 juillet, 1841. S.M.W.A.

²⁵ 14 octobre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ Father Lalumiere's second church was Saint Mary's in Daviess County, the first church blessed by Bishop Bruté, and his third was the brick church, Saint Aloysius's, at the Kentucky settlement at the North Arm in Edgar County, Illinois.

On the third day of July 1831 was blessed here on ridge, St. Peter's Church, a frame, 38x28. The ceremony was performed by Rev. Mr. L. Picot, and S. P. Lalumiere preached.²⁷

In 1841 the Reverend Julien Delaune was pastor at Saint Peter's. Of the Brothers' party the Bishop wrote on October 26: "They are all at Mr. Delaune's, superior and Brothers."²⁸ This location was the site of the first house of the Congregation of Holy Cross in America.

The Sisters had never lost their devotion to the Brothers since the early days at Ruillé, which all the professed Sisters of the group at Saint Mary's remembered well. Though only one of the early Brothers, Brother Vincent, was personally known to them and they were unacquainted also with Father Sorin, the disappointment was keen at Saint Mary's when the missionary band passed down the river and stopped at Terre Haute without pausing to see them. Even to inquire about Sister Saint Francis, whom the Brothers had left behind in New York, or about their devoted friends Mr. Byerley and Mme. Parmentier and many mutual friends in France, would have been a consolation to the French hearts at Saint Mary's. A few weeks later knowing the needs of the American farm from a year of experience, Mother Theodore dispatched Theodore Troné to Saint Peter's with a wagon and a yoke of oxen which, as the diary records, "we are giving to the Brothers." Just after New Year's Brother Vincent wrote to Mother Theodore from Saint Peter's:

I am very happy to have the opportunity of sending you a few words. I have wished to do so for a long time, and even when passing through Terre Haute, I would have gone to say good day to you but we stopped only long enough to feed our horses.

When I left my establishment in France near Gravelle, good Sister Saint Bernard at Argentré gave me a small package for you. I gave it to Monseigneur as soon as I reached Vincennes; no doubt you have already received it. When we left Le Mans old Mr. Tulare of Brother Bonaventure's family asked us to tell you a thousand things from him. . . . You know that his son Brother Alphonse is in Africa where he renders great service by his position but still more by the good example which he gives. By sending us this family you have conferred a great favor upon the Community.

We have still to thank you for your wagon and your two good oxen. They have already worked a great deal. Lately the Brother farmer has gone to Waginton²⁹ to get a plank wagon with which he has pretty well tested the oxen's strength for he had a famous load. What is still better, however, is that they are very gentle. What shall we offer you in return for all this? Our thanks and best wishes for the New Year accompanied with a good part in our prayers on condition that you will give us a share in yours and in those of your Sisters.³⁰

As events decreed, the Brothers spent only a year at Saint Peter's. When they passed through Terre Haute en route for South Bend in November, 1842, to the new site which the Bishop had offered them, Father Sorin and four Brothers, the advance guard, arrived first. The three remaining members of the party came at a slower pace with the oxen transporting the Community effects. A third group spent the winter at Saint Peter's, where Father Etienne Chartier, who had accompanied

²⁷ Records of St. Joseph's Church, Terre Haute.

²⁸ S.M.W.A.

²⁹ Washington.

³⁰ S.M.W.A.

the Sisters from Philadelphia and afterwards joined Father Sorin's Community, was superior. A faded penciled note in Father Sorin's handwriting in the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Archives explains this hurried journey.

T. Haute, November 20, 1842

My very dear Mother, I am passing through here as perhaps you know. You have learned of our change of place. I am going to South Bend with 4 Brothers. Three are following us. The others will spend the winter at St. Peter's & join us in the spring. How glad I would be to see you, my good Mother. You will excuse me, I know. I am not able to delay for the day it would require. Let us deprive ourselves of the pleasure of spending a few hours together. You must be surprised at all this shifting about. I cannot tell you more of it at present. Kindly assure your good daughters of my sincere devotedness to your dear family. Please pray & secure prayers for the success of such a voyage in such a season. Adieu, my v. dear Mother, adieu. Believe me Entirely yours in X^{to} J. D. N. I sold Mr. Byerley's farm again before leaving. Try to draw him to come here. Adieu, adieu. Sorin.

My good Mother, I would see you with gt. pleasure at St. Peter's, if such were the will of Heaven.⁸¹

The Holy Cross Congregation too began to grow as soon as they were domiciled in America. "The Brothers too have some novices," wrote the Bishop. "Truly do we merit so many favors? . . . How astonishing it is to see such things in so new a country!"⁸²

The Bishop's strange character, his inexplicable harshness and exactions were the cause of the bitter and heavy cross which bore so heavily on the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for seven long years. Was there friction and suffering apparent as early as 1841? Sister Saint Francis's letters let us see that the cross was already Mother Theodore's daily bread. The Bishop's peculiarities seem to have emerged only gradually in his relations with the Community at large. His silence and his cold reception of the young religious whom he had sought out in her home in France and encouraged to follow him to Indiana, are explicable only when one remembers the burden of debt, of anxiety and failure which already weighed so crushingly upon him.

Monseigneur de la Hailandière is a saint. I do not fear to say it, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Mother Mary, but his sanctity is the effect of grace and virtue. What he has received from nature is painful especially to him and sometimes to others also. His susceptibility is conquered only by his charity, and you know, Mother, how far acquired virtues often are from harmonizing with the natural bent of the heart. He easily forms prejudices. . . . With so much business and so little money he is obliged to go about almost begging from his priests in order to exist. He owes more than a hundred thousand francs for the churches of his diocese, which will be sold for Protestant services if not soon paid for.⁸³

She had been at Saint Mary's only a very short time when she discovered Mother Theodore's heaviest cross, "the icy coldness with which Monseigneur treats her even before the postulants."

Mother Theodore's letters to the Bishop were probably all burnt when large numbers of papers in the Vincennes archives were committed

⁸¹ 20 novembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁸² 25 novembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁸³ 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

to the flames³⁴ after his resignation and departure. His letters to her however have practically all been preserved, and through them like the half-obliterated characters of a palimpsest appear her anxieties, her perplexities, and griefs. In March of this year he asked her in writing to France "not to blame the Bishop of Vincennes. It is not necessary to deny that you have had many privations to endure, many crosses, but say that you love these crosses."³⁵ Later he commanded her to give up any thought of returning to France which she wished to do and acknowledged that he had accused her falsely.³⁶ Again he reproved her for saying she was without friends, but he seemed aware that she had been through a painful experience when Father Buteux was leaving no stone unturned to induce her to retire and leave the formation of the rising Community to him. Though the Bishop realized that she was experiencing a period of extreme anxiety and mental suffering, nothing was done till the visit of Father Petit, the Kentucky Jesuit, in September, who when Mother Theodore consulted him, insisted that God had blessed her work too visibly for her to think of withdrawing, and he induced the Bishop to remove Father Buteux. Late in October, 1841, the Bishop wrote: "It is to our interest to keep these dear Sisters of Providence."³⁷ Thus far therefore the Bishop seemed content with the little group of lonely Frenchwomen in their little corner of his diocese.

His building projects with their concurrent expenses added however to his burdens. "Since I examined Father Buteux's accounts at Saint Mary's I have furnished more than \$1,500, but even so my debts have not diminished. I owe almost as much and for all the new building which has been done over and above. This in truth it is which crushes me. I do not know where to find the money. This is why I am overwhelmed with a depression which nothing can relieve, not even the remarkable success which God is giving you."³⁸ In this same letter he reproved her because she wept that he had shown to others her letters, filled with confidential conscience matter and details about her house and her Sisters. In this same month, December 22, 1841, however, he wrote to Bishop Bouvier:

I deeply regret that the house of Ruillé is unable to supply us with the two subjects we solicited. . . . I wrote six months ago to the Superior General that I would not ask again. God has preserved Sister Theodore to us. I am well satisfied with her.³⁹

He had now some apprehension lest the Sisters might be recalled to France, which would mean the dissolution of the Community and difficulty in securing another, as well as the loss of the money expended for the Sisters' establishment. He asked of Bishop Bouvier some guarantee that they would not be recalled. "Sister Irma has arrived better in health than we could have expected."

In December, 1841, he was then according to his own words "satisfied with Sister Theodore." Would this have been her opinion? When she

³⁴ Alerding, *History of Vincennes Diocese*, p. 174.

³⁵ 20 mars, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³⁶ 13 juin, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³⁷ 26 octobre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³⁸ 17 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³⁹ S.M.W.A.

first met the Bishop in civilian clothes in the inn at Madison, did she then or later foresee that in his strange, grasping, susceptible character God was preparing for her the cross that would sanctify her? She must have known it very early. Her first letters to her superiors at Ruillé while acknowledging the sufferings, solitude, want, physical hardships of every kind which she saw before her, yet expressed the premonition of a still heavier cross, the suspicion and distrust of her superiors, the bitterest cross in the opinion of spiritual writers which God can offer to a religious.⁴⁰ In November, 1840, less than a month after her arrival at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Mother Theodore wrote to France:

We have found in Monseigneur the coldest, the most irresolute person we have ever met. His conversation is so obscure that after talking with him for an hour, I do not know what he has said or meant. . . . With me he appears very reserved, telling me only what he cannot avoid, but . . . I may be the cause of it by the resolute tone I took when it was a question of changing our costume or of going into the country.⁴¹

The novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods continued during all these months to develop in an amazing manner. At first there was no question of lay Sisters, but before long the Bishop began to receive applications from so many estimable young girls, who for lack of early opportunities could never hope to function as teachers, that he proposed their reception as lay Sisters. "I think it very probable that you could have lay Sisters by changing the name," he wrote.⁴² Most of the pioneer women were illiterate, and the native Hoosiers and Kentuckians were no exceptions to this general rule. The immigrants, too, deprived for centuries of educational facilities in their native land, were not better educated. On the early deeds in which the first purchases of the convent property at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods are recorded, practically all the wives of the original owners signed with a mark.

The Bishop's letters of this time contain many references to prospective postulants:

Mr. Kundek's postulant has arrived, German, speaks English rather well, and seems very gentle. I do not know whether it is as a Sister or a Sister servant that she will enter. I think the former. Christine Walter from Mrs. Moore's has just applied, but I referred her to her confessor. Mr. Dupontavice is offering me two. You know that I wrote to Mr. Hamion for his postulant to come if she wishes to be a Sister servant. Mr. Bessonies says that one of his, who wishes to try the life at Jasper, would prefer to go as a Sister servant.⁴³

So ill instructed however were the young persons who presented themselves that Sister Saint Francis Xavier, who was much in their company from her first arrival, considered a novitiate of three years the minimum essential to prepare them for the religious life. The most desirable and gifted of the novices was Yvonne Pardeillan, the first Sister Marie Joseph. A perfect character and very good will were the qualities that Sister Saint

⁴⁰ R. Plus, S.J., *Folly of the Cross*, Tr. by Irene Heramann (Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, London, 1927), p. 49.

⁴¹ A Mère Marie, 14 novembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

⁴² 5 juin, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴³ 2 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

Francis Xavier admired in this fervent novice. "Would that all could be like her!"

On October 8, the day the Brothers had gone through, two postulants were received with the traditional ceremony customary for many years, the chanting after Vespers of the *Veni Creator* and the *Ave Maris Stella* in the chapel: Sister Augustine, Mary Ann Graham, from Logansport and Catherine Guthneck, Sister Therese, the first member of an Alsatian family from the Picquet colony at Sainte Marie, Illinois, which was knit by the closest ties to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods during all the early years. On December 5 Father Joseph Kundek, a zealous Croatian priest, established in a flourishing German settlement in the southern part of the state, sent another aspirant to the novitiate, Catherine Eisen, a young German girl later known as Sister Catherine. Later in the same month Father Perché, the pastor at Portland, Kentucky, whom Mother Theodore had known in France at Angers, arrived with two young women, one a twenty-six-year-old Irish girl, Sophia Kennedy, long known in the Community as Sister Mary Celestia. A protégé of the Bishop's, she was one of four early postulants whom he had, greatly to Mother Theodore's regret, encouraged to transfer to the Sisters of Providence from the Vincennes Sisters of Charity. An American postulant, Sister Mary Philomene Doyle, the first to enter after the Sisters arrived, and a young Irishwoman, Father Varela's postulant from Pennsylvania, Sister Gabriella Moore, were received by the Bishop about this time.

Small as the Community was in the first year, it sprang from four distinct national groups: the Kentuckians, native Americans of one or two generations, the Germans, the Irish, and the original French colony. Despite this diversity of sentiments, early training, and viewpoint, the new recruits bowed their heads with a sweet and happy unanimity to the yoke of Christ. The spirit of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir had indeed crossed the ocean with the Foundress and had begun to grow and flourish in the Indiana wildwood. "What has struck me here," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, "is the exactitude with which silence is kept. I do not think a dozen words are said outside the time of recreation."⁴⁴ "Truly a good spirit reigns in our house," wrote Mother Theodore. "... the postulants are becoming gentle, confiding, humble, and submissive as far as could be expected of Americans. I refer to those who have been with us for a year or more. I hope the newcomers will follow their example. They seem to love us much. The spirit of obedience in Sister Saint Francis Xavier, her humility and her spirit of sacrifice will be of infinite benefit to them. . . . She humbles herself so admirably for her distractions, her want of order, and so forth, that I doubt not that her presence here will be more useful than that of a very capable person. What cannot a soul like hers do with God?"⁴⁵

Sister Saint Francis Xavier herself early realized the immense responsibility which was hers, as after Mother Theodore, she had more to do than any other one person in forming the standards and the spirit of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. To the goodness and mercy

⁴⁴ 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁵ S.M.W.A.

of God it was due that the Community was founded by saints. Sister Saint Francis Xavier felt from the first the minute observation with which her least actions were regarded by the American novices and the great influence of her example:

In spite of my weakness, she wrote to Mother Saint Charles, God wanted me here. I have never doubted it a single instant since I left you. I feel my heart dilate in the midst of this solitude. My health even is improving. I shall have much to suffer, but I will try to love God a great deal and to make Him loved. . . . There is much good to be done here, but one must be a saint or go back, for the eyes of the postulants and the children are upon us. The least thing will disedify them.⁴⁶

Sister Saint Francis Xavier has left us in one of her letters to France a very comprehensive picture of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as it was shortly after her arrival:

Our farmhouse, she writes, is a little wooden house in which there is a dormitory, a refectory, and a room. Our beds have a feather bed and a feather pillow, and, although very close together, I think one can sleep easily. Our refectory serves also as recreation room, study hall, bakery, etc. The room is occupied during the day by Sister Theodore, who writes and transacts business there. There too we have our English lessons. . . . We have a little chapel in which we are seated on benches.⁴⁷

Last Sunday we had delightful weather. I took a walk with the postulants over our domain. I had not seen the effect produced by our little dwelling in the midst of the forest. It is very pretty, I assure you. I joyfully saluted the cross surmounting our little wooden steeple. . . . On all sides I behold deep forests whose limits seem to me as boundless as the ocean; a ravine between Providence and the boarding school over which is a rustic bridge; the little dwelling of Abbé Paret, where the faithful assemble for High Mass and Vespers; a beautiful blue sky overhead, and in the distance some white crosses, reminding us of the road over which we must one day pass to arrive at our true country; a flock of birds; sheep in a prairie cleared by our Sisters; cows and peaceful oxen, and nearer the house, dogs and chickens.⁴⁸

Of the dense forest which surrounded them she wrote:

Our forest is truly magnificent. The trees are gigantic; the wild vines creep to their summits and hang down in festoons to the ground, where, taking on new life, they burst forth in a thousand new shoots. The tulip trees, magnolias, and catalpas, loaded with their white flowers, bend gracefully to the breeze. Nothing is so pretty as the fragrant snowflakes which they scatter about. They are fitting censers loaded with perfume, and white clouds inclining before God under the gigantic naves of His temple without limits.⁴⁹

Mother Theodore's account written a few months later is more complete and succinct:

Now, dear Mother, let me tell you also of our consolations. We have a little chapel, where we have the happiness of possessing the Blessed Sacrament. We have Holy Mass every day . . . and Benediction twice a week. This chapel, made of an enclosed porch and only seven feet high, is quite presentable. We whitewashed and painted it ourselves. It contains a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin sent by M. de la Bertaudière, with candlesticks and a fine silver-plated crucifix. But we will be compelled to put all these things in the church which is being built for the parish as our chapel is too small for the people. Our chapel was blessed the second of this month

⁴⁶ A Mère Saint Charles, 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁷ 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁸ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 216.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

and then the Bishop gave the habit to two postulants (one an American, the other Irish) whom we had had more than a year. On the thirteenth he erected the Stations of the Cross.⁵⁰

Our house is composed of three parts: one room which serves every purpose and which we use for common assembly; another, called mine, in which we take our recreations, study our English lessons, hold Chapter and also our Council meetings; lastly, there is a dormitory containing fifteen beds which completely fill it. The Bishop has had us build two wings to this house. They are now under roof, and in the spring will have their doors and windows put in. Then we shall be fairly well lodged for daughters of the forest. . . . We could have a garden three times as large as yours, if we had help enough to cultivate it. But we have only our good Frenchman Brassier and one of his sons who is afflicted. The others went down to New Orleans where they can earn more than here.

We have three horses and a little colt, two cows, two oxen, perhaps fifty or sixty hogs, maybe more than a hundred chickens, some geese, five sheep, and a tiny lamb. . . . Our men are busy all winter cutting wood and yet they can hardly supply enough for our three houses including the priests' house. . . . The health of the Sisters is passable, though Sister Basilide and Sister Olympiade have changed considerably and aged a good deal. It is said that I have changed more than they have. I do not see myself. The fact is that I am sick continually. Every time I write to you I think it is the last. But I exemplify the French proverb, Whoever works lives. May I live for God alone!⁵¹

The Indiana priests in general and others who visited Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at this time were very favorably impressed especially with Mother Theodore. One of them gave his opinion to the Bishop that the diocese possessed in her "an extraordinary woman far above the usual in mind and character, very self-possessed and steadfast, endowed with correct views, sound judgment, wide experience, and a true idea of the religious spirit."⁵² They were all convinced that she was destined to accomplish immense good in Indiana.

The year 1841 was almost at an end, but God and Our Lady were reserving one more joy for the Sisters before its close. Heralded with minute directions by M. de la Bertaudière and carefully routed westward by Mr. Byerley, their statue of Our Lady was on the way.

I have at last succeeded in procuring a statue of the Blessed Virgin (Immaculate Conception). I was obliged to address myself to Dominic Massini, the Italian statuary, who has made the altars and the statues in our church. The dealers at Angers had only mediocre pieces without solidity. I wish you to be pleased with it. Amateurs here like it very much. I thought at first that the head was small, but a young girl never has a full face. How much I desire that your promise, with the execution of which you have charged me, and which I accomplished with so much pleasure, may obtain for you life and health and all the happiness one can enjoy in this poor existence. . . . I am sending also four plated candlesticks and a mounted crucifix.⁵³

The box came down the Ohio with Sister Saint Francis Xavier, and the Bishop announced it to Mother Theodore when he told her of Sister's arrival. "The baggage . . . and the immense statue (it weighs six hundred

⁵⁰ Probably the Stations in the reclusium hall.

⁵¹ A Mère Marie, 26 février, 1842.

⁵² Rev. N. J. Perché, 8 janvier, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁵³ 20 juillet, 1841. S.M.W.A.

pounds) will come later.”⁵⁴ He refers again to “the tall and enormous statue as large as a house and weighing six hundred and forty pounds. You will have a hard time to find a place for it. . . . All will go up by steamboat, care of Mr. Williams.”⁵⁵ The freight on the case was seventy-four dollars. On the feast of the Expectation of the Blessed Virgin it arrived, and M. de la Bertaudière’s directions for unpacking carefully observed, their beloved Madonna stepped forth from the immense case in maiden majesty and grace to smile upon their woodland for over a hundred years.⁵⁶

Cherished still as a precious souvenir of the early days, the little Madonna with outstretched merciful hands stands upon the world, their two countries, France and America beneath her feet. When at last the statue was mounted in the space reserved for it above and behind the altar in the chapel, and the handsome silver crucifix and candlesticks from M. de la Bertaudière replaced their pewter ones, a new courage and joy filled the hearts of Our Lady’s daughters of the woods. Mary had smiled down on their woodland choosing it for her own even before the Foundress and her five companions arrived on October 22, 1840. Now they felt she had begun her reign in their forest in very truth.

⁵⁴ 11 novembre, 1841. S.M.W.A. .

⁵⁵ 2 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁶ Still preserved in Providence Community Room.

CHAPTER VIII

BEGINNINGS IN EDUCATION

FOUNDATION OF THE ACADEMY

"How much good there is to be done here, and how sublime is our vocation."

MOTHER THEODORE

PIONEER America was acutely land-conscious. Broad acres represented the settler's first need and his highest ambition, the source of his sustenance and his wealth, the criterion of his financial success and his social position. But this primary necessity at least in part satisfied, America turned to education with a devotion not yet appeased. The eagerness and ambition of the American people for instruction was noted at once by the French missionaries at Vincennes. Bishop de la Hailandière refers to it in his letters, and Mother Theodore as soon as she reached New York became at once aware of this outstanding characteristic of the new country. She described in writing back to France the Americans' zest for learning and especially their interest in the accomplishments. Drawing, painting, and music, she soon discovered, would be essential to the very existence of the schools they planned to establish. The early French missionary nuns were a little impatient with this insatiable thirst for knowledge. Of one of them it is told that when the pioneers' daughters asked for algebra, she greeted the request with surprise and displeasure. "Algebra! Nonsense! They shall be taught to sew." The fine arts also long continued to have as a rule for the Hoosier maidens a charm far beyond the appeal of the homely arts of sewing and cooking.

The Westerners were not behind the people of the Atlantic seaboard in their educational ambitions. Sister Benedicta Parsons remarked their capabilities in Vincennes to Mother Rose White at Emmitsburg, "Dear Mother, such fine prospects here! . . . in the West people are much smarter than they are generally thought to be by folks in the East."¹ Shortly after the arrival of the Sisters of Charity from Emmitsburg, they asked and obtained permission to teach the same branches of education as at Saint Joseph's² and later added drawing and music to their curriculum.³ Years earlier the Nazareth Sisters had established in their little village school at Vincennes the same course of study currently taught at Nazareth, then the foremost boarding school of the South.

Education in America at the time was still largely under religious auspices. The public school system and its attendant secularization, inaugurated in Massachusetts in 1840, took some thirteen years to cross the Alleghenies and appeared in Indiana only toward the end of Mother Theodore's career. In 1840 in Indiana rural schools similar to the one of the 1850's depicted by Eggleston in *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, dotted

¹ *Bruté-Seton Correspondence*, p. 538.

² *Ibid.*, p. 518.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 550.

the woods. Several of these pioneer schools with their curriculum of the three R's functioned in Vigo County. Schoolmasters often worked on the farms during the summer, and in the autumn, when idleness and quiet descended upon the countryside, and the crops were harvested and stored, master and pupils adjourned to the log schoolhouse. In these early schools, educational equipment, blackboards, maps, and charts were unknown. A stove, rude desks and benches for teacher and pupils, and a supply of drinking water and firewood constituted the only furniture of the American district school. Reading, writing, and enough arithmetic to keep accounts and compute interest comprised a curriculum supplemented at intervals by the ever popular spelling matches. In many schools the pupils studied aloud with resultant pandemonium. Corporal punishment was universal, and many an overgrown and recalcitrant lad was flogged along the royal path to learning. In fact the inability to wield the omnipresent birch spelled the ruin of many an incipient schoolmaster. Even in the schools of New York City at this period the birch or rattan switch hung in full sight behind the master's desk.

Many years earlier Catholic schools had been opened in connection with the churches built in Kentucky and at Vincennes where Gibault, Flaget, and Rivet all had pioneer schools. In 1834 however when Bishop Bruté arrived, except in the Indian mission, there were no Catholic schools in that diocese, the Sisters of Charity having withdrawn to Nazareth. The missionaries felt that bishops were their greatest need, and as soon as prelates were appointed for the newly established sees, their first thought was for churches and schools. Town life even in the colonial period of history made for educational advancement, and the unsettled conditions of the frontier militated against it, but towns were now fairly numerous in the "Western country."

The academy or high school training, which had been inaugurated by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, was early taken up and developed in Catholic boarding schools all over the country. Its popularity and extensive curriculum astonished Mother Theodore and her Sisters, as they observed it everywhere on their journey westward. These academies, Catholic and non-Catholic, constituted a definite species with carefully marked characteristics. All were private enterprises, and the curriculum, which varied greatly, was not, for girls, preparatory to college. The phenomenal development of college education by Sisters belongs mainly to the twentieth century. The system brought from France, which was reproduced in practically all the Sisters' schools in America, included the *école payante* or academy and *école gratuite*, the free or poor school. The pay school supported the free school by its tuition charges. In France the Sisters' schools were originally exclusively for girls as French boys were taught by priests and Brothers. In America by 1840 this system, the academy and poor or free school taught by Sisters, had already spread rapidly, and the Catholic Directory of 1840 lists fifty similar institutions in the United States.

The American Bishops, who met at stated intervals in Baltimore for the purpose of studying together and solving the problems of the Church in the United States, which was growing so rapidly from coast

to coast, hardly ever convened from the first Provincial Assembly of 1829 without adverting with increasing urgency to the necessity of providing for the education of Catholic children under Catholic auspices. At first it was thought possible in America for Catholic schools to share in the funds raised by taxation for educational purposes. The native Catholics and the immigrants were poor and the latter just beginning life in a strange land. The failure of Most Reverend John Hughes, however, in his epoch-making fight in New York in 1840 for public subsidies for Catholic schools, rightly or wrongly deterred others from attempting again a contest in which so doughty a warrior had been defeated. The parochial school system built up under double taxation, "the greatest glory of the American Church," grew out of that famous defeat, and successive waves of agitation riveted upon American Catholics a system perpetuated by provisos in almost all the State constitutions forbidding the use of public funds for private educational establishments. Indiana was among the first states (1851) to amend its constitution in this respect. In Grant's administration an attempt was even made to insert this provision into the Federal Constitution.

The parochial school system began largely in the schools of the Sisters of Emmitsburg after Bishop Hughes's great fight. These schools, however, had been inaugurated years before under French influence. "In a manuscript volume of Dubois," writes Sister Mary Regis Hoare, "we read that the regulations and rules, not only for the Sisters but also for the management of the schools, are made out by Father Dubois, who directs the mode of life at Saint Joseph's along all lines and that Mother Seton acts as Mother to the Sisters and Directress of the school entirely under his direction."⁴ The regime then was largely French. The situation did not differ greatly in the other native American Sisterhoods.

The subject of textbooks for Catholic schools had been discussed repeatedly by the prelates at Baltimore. Hardly a book then in general use in the schools of America was free from insinuations and open calumnies against the Catholic faith, and in 1833 the Baltimore Council appointed a committee to supervise the preparation of textbooks suitable for Catholic schools. Earlier even than this, however, Catholic publishers had been active, and many pious books had come from their presses. Even in so important a field as religion, however, no satisfactory text for general use was ever evolved.⁵ Different Bishops in America, Maréchal, Flaget, England, and others, issued their own special editions, and de la Hailandière at the synod of 1844 discussed printing a catechism for the Vincennes diocese. As no trace of it is now extant, his plan was probably never realized.

At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods before opening school the question of proper textbooks was imperative. The curriculum in the elementary schools at this time was practically fixed all over the country: reading, writing, arithmetic, and spelling, and sometimes history and geography. After English grammar came into fashion, the upper or intermediate sec-

⁴ *Mother Seton, Foundress of the American Catholic Parochial School System* (Boston College Dissertation, 1933), p. 16, Appendix.

⁵ Guilday, *History of the Councils of Baltimore*, p. 240.

tion of the common school was called the grammar school. Textbooks in every subject taught were a prime necessity, but the pioneers' children learned to read from the catechism, the New Testament, or any wholesome and simple work. The Bailly children were taught their letters at Carey Mission by Mrs. McCoy from the New Testament, and they learned reading from her largely by imitation phrase by phrase. This method was brought to America from Europe. All the Le Fer children learned to read from the large Royaumont Bible history.⁶ This was before the amazing vogue of McGuffey's Readers, which developed only in the fifties. Ray's Arithmetics had been published first in 1834, but in many schools texts in "cyphering" were scarce, and pupils copied correct "sums" on sheets of paper made into notebooks. Eventually, owing to the great industrial development of America, educational expansion between the years 1835 to 1850 brought arithmetic into prominence. Later three books in a series were covered in the common schools and a higher arithmetic in academies and colleges.⁷

Grammar in the 1840's was a subject of developing interest owing to the decay of Latin studies. From 1850 to 1875 it became the principal branch of the curriculum though dominated by the rote method, a legacy from the old Latin program. During the years before 1850 grammars poured from the American press. After Murray's appeared, as many as a thousand different editions of various grammars came out before 1840.⁸ Murray's and Webster's Grammars, Gould Brown's, Bullion's, and Roswell Smith's were immensely popular, and during the forties parsing reigned supreme.⁹ Spelling had already reached its peak in 1825. Begun as an "incidental study, it became a craze in the first quarter of the nineteenth century," and eighty million copies of Webster's blue-backed speller were sold before 1880.¹⁰ Eggleston gives an unforgettable description of an old-time spelling match.¹¹ Composition in American common schools up to 1840 was unknown, and "pupils learned to write by studying a textbook of orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody without ever writing even so much as a sentence."¹²

The Sisters of Providence found therefore a definite framework already practically set up and awaiting them into which their schools perforce must fit. It was not an entirely alien regime, and they at once saw the advisability of conforming to it. Traditions and ideals brought from Europe must reinforce it largely in the realm of character and religious training, but the education in its main outlines must be fitted for American girls in an American environment. Bishop de la Hailandière understood this as soon as Mother Theodore did. "It is to establish the French

⁶ Preserved in the Museum at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

⁷ W. S. Monroe, "Development of Arithmetic as a School Subject," (*Bureau of Education* 1917), no. 17, p. 94.

⁸ R. L. Lyman, "English Grammar in American Schools before 1850," (*U. S. Education Bulletin* 1921), no. 12, p. 81.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.

¹¹ Eggleston, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, pp. 79-88 (Revised Ed., Grosset & Dunlap, N. Y., 1899).

¹² Lyman, "English Grammar in American Schools before 1850," p. 151.

religious spirit here that he has asked for us,"¹³ wrote Mother Theodore.

Mother Theodore herself was a born educator. She was richly endowed by nature with gifts which make for outstanding achievement in any field, quick perception, accurate judgment, and persistence; and in addition she had the tact and ingenuity, the kindness and humor, the sincere and winning personality which spell success above all in the school. In her day teacher training was still in its infancy and teaching techniques an individual affair. Each teacher must carve out her own empire in the hearts and minds of her pupils as best she could. Mother Theodore loved to relate for her Sisters' instruction her experience when, a young superior and just professed as a religious, she appeared before the demoralized children of one of the most depraved sections of the city of Rennes, who laughed to scorn her efforts to control them and danced and sang about the classroom to annoy and disconcert her. How she disarmed and won them was an oft-told tale to emphasize the dictum that love and interest, not force, are the prime educational factors, a truth which, though pointed out in Bishop Bouvier's Rule,¹⁴ was less understood then than now.

Mother Cecilia, who greatly admired her superior's talents as an educator, tells the success which quickly became evident in this group of six hundred well-disposed children profiting especially by the religious instruction which transformed their lives and by tuition in a variety of manual skills which would later enable them to earn their livelihood. Influenced by the children, the parents too gradually reformed, and the district, no longer the abode of disorder and vice, became peaceful and law-abiding. Mother Theodore could never stress sufficiently the importance in dealing with pupils of reaching past the barrier of school books and school discipline to the child's will sitting there in ambush, indifferent, reluctant, even hostile. She had perfected herself as a teacher and school supervisor during a successful career of seventeen years in France before coming to America, and in Soulaïnes her teaching of mathematics had won the coveted distinction of a medallion decoration publicly conferred. The same qualities which had contributed to her reputation as an educator in France came into play in Indiana and soon won for the academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods a place in the first rank among the schools of the state.

All along the way on their journey westward the group of pioneer Sisters of Providence were carefully observing the educational institutions which came within their knowledge. In New York they did not come into direct contact with Mother Seton's Sisters who had been there since 1817. Madame Parmentier's eldest daughter Adele, after 1841 Mrs. Edward Bayer, however had received part of her education in America, and twelve-year-old Rosine was one of the first pupils at the old Sacred Heart Academy, opened by Mother Galitzin in 1841 on Houston Street in New York, where the same year Sister Saint Francis Xavier spent six weeks. The Parmentiers were therefore well informed upon the American educational setup and could give considerable information. In Philadel-

¹³ A Mère Marie, 14 novembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

¹⁴ *Constitutions et Règles*, p. 54.

phia the Emmitsburg Sisters received the Sisters of Providence at their orphan asylum, and the stay of the travelers in Baltimore was very brief, but at Frederick they were welcomed at "a fine academy" by the Emmitsburg Sisters.

They teach the various sciences scarcely known in our French schools, but they excel in music which is an indispensable thing in this country, even for the poor, wrote Mother Theodore. No piano, no pupils. Such is the spirit of the country—Music and Steam. At Frederick, of the five Sisters, three teach piano and guitar.¹⁵

At Louisville again the necessity of including the accomplishments in any curriculum for American girls was borne in upon the Sisters. The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth at the Presentation Academy amazed the travellers, not only by their virtue, but also by their rare talents. "They also teach music; without this branch, again I say, no pupils neither rich nor poor."¹⁶ At Vincennes at Saint Mary's Academy maintained by four Emmitsburg Sisters of Charity, practically the same conclusion was forced upon the French Sisters. "The two pianos which the Sisters have for twelve pupils . . . are going from the beginning of the day to the end."¹⁷

Though ready and willing to conform to American needs and curricula, the Sisters were not unprepared for their task in the field of education. The French Sisters of Providence possessed a regime of instruction, which had been highly successful in France and is outstanding in education all over the world even to the present day, none other than the system established in the seventeenth century by Saint John Baptist de la Salle and popularized in the educational institutions of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Bishop Bouvier's Rule points out the pedagogical methods and the school equipment of the Brothers as models to be followed by the Sisters of Providence in all their schools. They were not alone in this. The French trace was already deeply marked upon Catholic education in America. The American Sisters' schools, even those taught by the native American orders, all bore the imprint of de la Salle's training, as they were in practically every case founded and supervised by French priests who were themselves products of the Brothers' schools.

Among the books brought from France for the new American foundation was a copy of the 1837 edition of the *Conduite des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, Par Messire de la Salle, Prêtre, Docteur en Théologie et Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes, Revue et Corrigée, the very book held up in the Rule as the Sisters' guide in teaching. First in Europe to replace Latin by the vernacular and the individual by the simultaneous method, Saint de la Salle's system has stood the test of divergent times and continents, and in the hands of his Brothers has encircled the globe. Normal schools for his teachers were another of his epoch-making innovations copied only slowly and much later by others.

The outstanding norms of the system remained largely unchanged all through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: silence, the use of signals, emphasis upon religious teaching, stress upon written work, class recitations, grading, and confidence in the best pupils. No doubt the small

¹⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 43.

¹⁶ *J. and L.*, p. 51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

calf-bound copy of *Conduct of the Christian Schools* occupied an honored place next to the works of Saint Teresa, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint-Jure, and Grou in the tiny spiritual library at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The first pages of Saint de la Salle's book outline the daily program for the three primary grades to be reproduced in many American Sisters' schoolrooms:

8, daily Mass, followed by the reading lesson; 9:15, spelling, followed by dictation; 10:15, prayers; 1:15, review and recitation of the morning's lessons followed by arithmetic; 2:45, writing; 4, catechism.

Later pages explain his system in detail. The use of the small wooden implement called the signal, employed to begin and end recitation, to point out failures, and to inaugurate different stages of the daily program, alternates in de la Salle's book with explanations of other devices such as changing rank in class for successful recitation, upon the manner of making the quill pens still used in 1840, and directions on the method of teaching the different subjects. Aside from her necessary explanations, the teacher was encouraged to speak as little as possible, hence the use of the signal. It was thought that dominated by her stronger personality and won by her example, the pupils would be gained to silence and study. Children are ordinarily happy in quiet and order, and disorder makes them restless. Saint de la Salle criticized sharply the placing of incorrect forms before pupils for correction, a practice which had no place in his system. Emulation, weekly contests, monthly examinations and promotions, and rewards in the form of devotional books and pictures, special privileges, commendatory letters to parents, reports, and medals for excellence are characteristic of this system. Emulation is no longer popular, but intelligently used, it has been responsible for much success in education. Short prayers at opening and change of class, the Crucifix, pious pictures, and mottoes concerning the duties of pupils accentuated the religious atmosphere.

The entire system, practiced carefully in the schools of the Sisters of Providence in France and thus familiar to all the French Sisters, took root at once and flourished on American soil. Girls of the eighties and nineties will recognize its provisions, which at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and elsewhere in the schools of the Sisters of Providence regulated their lives. The small gadget known as the signal, so familiar to the old girls in their teachers' hands, was made exactly on the model described and pictured by Saint de la Salle.¹⁸ The pupils of Saint Mary's Academic Institute who rose at one stroke of the signal on a book and filed out of the long study hall "avec modestie," "avec ordre et en silence" were fulfilling to the letter the requirements of Saint de la Salle enunciated a hundred years before in France.¹⁹

The Rule of the Sisters of Providence in 1835 followed the Saint's prescriptions closely in the chapters devoted to education, but in addition urged especially upon the Sisters the necessity of guiding their pupils

¹⁸ *Conduite des Ecoles Chrétiennes* (1837 Ed.), Appendix: "The signal shall be of the exact size indicated in the design. The gut string to hold the tongue of the signal shall be as large as the D or second violin string."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

by kindness and love. In the practical lessons in pedagogy, given by Mother Theodore to her little Community, the memory of which was later one of their most precious souvenirs, Saint de la Salle's book was her guide. A skillful and successful teacher herself she could speak with authority.²⁰ Most of the Sisters knew that she had been publicly decorated at Soulaïnes the year before they left France, and they had often heard of her conquest at Rennes of the roomful of unruly children who had delighted to cause the tears of their former teachers.

Her planning and supervision were the heart and soul of the educational work of the Sisters of Providence in America. While adding willingly what was best in American methods to their own precious educational heritage, she rejected completely the slavish rote system in learning and writing the English language current in American schools. From this the Sisters of Providence at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were delivered by the care and devotion to epistolary correspondence of a nation which had produced a Madame de Sévigné and a Eugénie de Guérin. For models the Sisters needed not to look further afield than the incomparable journal of Mother Theodore herself of which they had almost all made copies for various friends in France. In the curriculum set forth in the first prospectus of October, 1841, English composition and rhetoric were listed among the subjects taught. Natural philosophy, chemistry, botany, mythology, biography, and astronomy, were also offered to girls of high school age. French was taught from Noel and Chapsal's grammar.

As to school equipment, Massachusetts waited for blackboards till the forties,²¹ but the Sisters of Providence had been familiar with their use for many years in France and had in the manual of Saint de la Salle detailed instructions upon the size and construction of the blackboards required in each school room.²² They bought maps and charts on their way west, assisted by the devoted Parmentiers.

Urged by the Bishop's destitution and their own desire to be self-supporting, the little group of pioneer Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods opened school tentatively as soon as they could possibly house their handful of pupils. "You know that forced by circumstances in order to begin to make ourselves useful and to earn our bread, we opened a boarding school the second of last July," wrote Mother Theodore to Mother Mary.²³ The Bishop's letters of this time had one ever-recurring complaint, his penury, his debts, his dark outlook for the future. Land and church site purchases and his elaborate building program at Vincennes, which was later disapproved by his brother Bishops, had already exhausted the large sums he had secured in France. "I have no money," he wrote to Mother Theodore, in June, 1841,²⁴ and in October: "Now let me tell you

²⁰ Mother Anastasie to her last years had a vivid remembrance of the model classes held for the teachers by Mother Theodore. At one of them, Mother Anastasie, then a very young Sister, took upon herself to play the role of recalcitrant pupil. One glance of surprise however from Mother Theodore's dark eyes reduced her to silence and repentance.

²¹ Lyman, *English Grammar in American Schools before 1850*, p. 149.

²² *Conduite des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, Appendix.

²³ 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

²⁴ 13 juin, 1841. S.M.W.A.

that I have not one cent. Be careful therefore not to go to any unnecessary expense."²⁵ Again and again he refers to his pecuniary embarrassments, though all during his incumbency in Indiana he was receiving generous donations from the Propagation of the Faith in France. No American Bishop was given so much. In 1840 he received over \$18,000, three times the amount allocated to the Bishops of Philadelphia, Nashville, and Natchez. Each year up to 1846 including the amounts to religious orders in the diocese his grant remained the largest.²⁶ Nevertheless his poverty never abated. It was largely in view of this painful destitution that Mother Theodore and the Sisters, though only poorly prepared, decided to open their little boarding school for a month on July 4, 1841.

As soon as it became known in Terre Haute that the Sisters who had come from France the previous autumn to settle in the woods across the river intended to open a school, considerable interest was manifested, and several pupils were offered. "Our presence here is a source of astonishment, but the people are glad to see us and promise us pupils to learn French," wrote Mother Theodore. "The consoling and encouraging thing is that religion is making great progress, and Protestants are beginning to abandon their prejudices."²⁷ Naturally Mrs. Susan Andrews Williams, Terre Haute's first Catholic, who had several daughters of school age, was among the first to desire to patronize the new school, but other pupils applied also from Vincennes and Paris. Despite the anti-Catholic prejudice which had been spread through the Middle West by itinerant pedlars selling the calumnious and shocking book of Rebecca Reed and especially the *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, who had never been a nun at any time, the Protestant parents of Terre Haute and the vicinity did not hesitate to entrust their children to the Sisters.

In June the Bishop directed Mother Theodore to announce the opening of the *pensionnat* in the Terre Haute paper, as "Mr. Richardson of York, Illinois, wishes to send his two daughters, and others also desire to reserve places."²⁸ The first advertisement ran for seven consecutive issues during the summer of 1841:

PROVIDENCE OF ST. MARY'S OF THE WOODS

Situated in Sugar Creek Tsp., Vigo Co., Ia., 4 miles northwest of Terre Haute

St. Mary's Academy for Young Ladies will open the second of July. Branches taught are as follows: Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography and History, both Ancient and Modern, English Composition, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Botany, Mythology, Biography, Astronomy, Rhetoric, Plain and Fancy Needlework, Bead work, Tapestry, and Lace work.

²⁵ 14 octobre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ 1839, 65,827 fr.; 1840, 90,400 fr.; 1841, 44,580 fr. and Vincennes Eudists, 20,000 fr.; 1842, 68,096.97 fr., Vincennes Eudists, 18,620 fr.; 1843, 67,760 fr., Vincennes Eudists, 10,000 fr., Brothers of St. Joseph, 14,240 fr.; 1844, 66,000 fr.; 1845, 65,000 fr. In 1846, 39,680 fr., the lowest amount ever received, and the only time the Vincennes grant was not the largest allocated to any American Bishop. 1847, 25,600 fr., Vincennes Eudists, 2,000 fr. From published lists in *Les Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, 1840-1847.

²⁷ A Mère Marie, 14 novembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

²⁸ 5 juin, 1841. S.M.W.A.

Terms—Boarding, including the above branches, per annum \$100.00

Extra charges

French language, per annum.....	10.00
Music, instrumental and vocal.....	30.00
Drawing and painting in water colors, imitation of oil painting on linen.....	20.00
Oil painting on velvet, oriental painting, embroidery and artificial flower work.....	10.00
Washing and mending per annum.....	12.00
Stationery	5.00
Medicine at the Apothecaries' rate.....	

Those who wish to learn the Latin, German, and Italian languages can do so. Terms the same as for the French. For further particulars application must be made to the Mother Superior. All letters directed to the Institution must be postpaid.

A Prospectus will be published in a few weeks. Mother St. Theodore.

N.B. The Chicago "Democrat," the Springfield, Ill., "Journal" and "Indiana Journal" will publish to the amount of \$3.00 each and charge "Courier."

Thomas Dowling, editor of the *Wabash Courier*, published in Terre Haute, had drawn attention in his issue of June 19, 1841, in an editorial comment to the advertisement of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods:

It will be seen by an advertisement in an adjoining column that the Female Academy in Sugar Creek Township will be open for the reception of Pupils on the 2d of July. The situation is healthful, and the building is extremely neat and well adapted to the purpose, being a three-story brick of the most tasteful construction.

Editor Dowling had ferried across the river and driven along the planks of the neglected National Road turning off to see the new school nearing completion in the woods and to reserve a place for his daughter.

The Bishop was making every effort to contribute to the success of the school. He sent a list of books which he had bought so that Sister Aloysia could order through Father Buteux from Cincinnati any which might be lacking. A series of objects amounting almost to five hundred dollars in value, which he purchased at this time, comprised the furniture for the new academy building, a set of dishes, a dozen chairs for the parlor, two dozen ordinary chairs, three large lamps, three pairs of andirons, and a "sopha" for his own provisional room at the priests' house to be followed by "another commoner one for general use."²⁹ The indispensable piano and the beds were still missing to Mother Theodore's great disappointment. The Bishop expressed satisfaction that the Sisters under her direction were preparing themselves for their work as teachers, and he warned them as to the tact necessary in dealing with their Protestant pupils:

I do not enjoin upon either you or your daughters to love these little girls. The good God will give you for them something of His own mercy, but I do recommend to you all extreme discretion in your religious relations with them. Do not give religious instruction directly either yourselves or through others. One or two acts of too ardent a zeal would put a stop to all the success you hope for.³⁰

A memorandum in the Bishop's writing still preserved belongs to this period and shows the minute supervision he gave to every detail of the

²⁹ A Mother Theodore, 5 juin, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³⁰ A Mother Theodore, 12 juillet, 1841. S.M.W.A.

Sisters' work. He lists the first faculty roster of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Academy:

All things well considered, Mother, in regard to the boarding school, this is what I feel inclined to determine:

1. You as superior
 2. Sister Aloysia, substitute
 3. Sister Basilide, Sister Marie Joseph, and one of our Americans
 4. Sister Olympiade or Catherine and an assistant
 5. Sister Liguori to give penmanship lessons
1. You would have the tact necessary to abandon all direction of the teaching to the Sister Substitute, who should after a time replace you with the parents when they present themselves. You will keep the personnel, the temporal affairs, the bookkeeping, etc. You could and perhaps should remain in the novitiate.
 2. Sister Aloysia in directing the instruction will do so according to the customs of the country, without excluding the improvements which might come from your way of doing in France.
 3. Under her direction the French Sisters will learn the American ways and could be sent later to found other establishments, where they could continue learning English and becoming acquainted with American customs.
 4. I think that Suzanne Reed, Sister Agnes's cousin, if she comes, and perhaps Elizabeth Lalumiere should go to the *pensionnat* in the beginning to receive their education unless there are a great many pupils.
 5. You will thus have from your place in the novitiate time for reflection before building. This will give time also for the money to come.
 6. I think that very soon we should take up the matter of your chapel. It will be easy to build you a large one.
 7. Sisters Basilide, Marie Joseph, etc., should be prepared at once and with care to fulfill the functions destined for them.⁸¹

This then, with Father Buteux to give music lessons, was the faculty for the boarding school. Catherine Guthneck, one of the postulants, was cook, and Sister Aloysia, a young religious of twenty-six, still a novice, was practically in charge. This was said to have been the Bishop's arrangement with her while she was still at Vincennes, and humanly speaking, she was the person best fitted for the post. She was the only educated English teacher. In May, 1841, seven months after their arrival in Indiana, Mother Theodore thus described her:

One especially, a convert from Protestantism, after passing several years among the Sisters of Charity in the East has devoted herself generously to the poor mission of Vincennes, and entered our novitiate. This is assuredly a marked evidence of God's Providence, for without her, who would have taught us English? Who would have been our interpreter with our postulants? Who would be able to begin a boarding school? We intend to place her at this dear *pensionnat* with Sister Basilide and a German Sister who was awaiting us here for a year.⁸²

The first month of school, July to August, 1841, was necessarily tentative in character, but as soon as the retreat was over, the pupils began to return. The Richardson twins announced their approaching arrival on August 30, driving from York, Illinois, across the river, perhaps in the very carriage brought from New York, long the only one in the country and admired especially by the Indians. The two Lalumieres, Susan and

⁸¹ n.d. [juin, 1841] S.M.W.A.

⁸² A Mère Marie, 2 août, 1841. S.M.W.A.

Elizabeth from Vincennes, Father Lalumiere's nieces, also returned, and among the new pupils were four from the Catholic colony in Edgar County, Illinois: Elizabeth and Jane Kelly from Paris, and Aloysius Brown's daughters Matilda and Jane from North Arm. Calista Hillebert accompanied the Richardson twins from York, and Anne and Ellen Donovan came from Vincennes. Kate Dowling from Terre Haute returned with Persis Holmes and Martha Warren. From farther away came Alice O'Brien from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Not all these girls arrived at once, as in the early years pupils might enter at any time during the year. In November, 1841, a few days after Sister Saint Francis Xavier's arrival, Mother Theodore wrote to Bishop Bouvier: "We have ten boarding pupils, almost all Protestants. Their prejudice is greatly diminished, and several speak of becoming Catholics"³³ Of different ages and advancement, most of the pupils were girls in their teens, and several like the Richardsons were prepared for high school work.

The faculty was now augmented by some of the postulants, who assisted with the music and English teaching. After the summer retreat of 1841 Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer had been named superior of the Academy. This good Sister's excessive timidity, however, made the post one of great suffering for her. Success was coming slowly. The weather was distressingly warm, but classes quickly got under way. The children grew to love the devoted French Sisters. Sister Basilide in particular won their hearts by her gaiety and kindness. After Sister Saint Francis Xavier's arrival she was added to the faculty as mistress of drawing and painting and her beautiful, clever, and saintly personality at once commanded respect and admiration. "I give drawing lessons to the children," she wrote, "and sacred history to the postulants. . . . The pupils of the boarding school without being mischievous are very hard to manage because of their pride and independence."

Sister Saint Francis is stronger than when she began her voyage from France, and she is beginning to give lessons tomorrow morning, wrote Mother Theodore in November. I think that despite her poor health she will accomplish much good.³⁴

Sister Basilide . . . is able already to teach a number of things in English and renders us great service in the classes to which she goes in the morning and returns at night. . . . We have twelve boarders, who are doing quite well. . . . Sister Olympiade's health has given way, and we are obliged to take her from the cooking, and give her the care of the lingerie of the boarding school, which will relieve good Sister Saint Vincent as she has taken upon herself to iron the children's linen.³⁵

Despite her piety and devotedness, Sister Saint Vincent did not achieve any success as superior of the Academy. Responsibility seemed to paralyze and disconcert her, and the burden of supervision there fell accordingly again upon Mother Theodore:

This house in reality makes one with ours as the Sisters make their spiritual exercises with us. This poor Sister Saint Vincent, however, withdrawn from her life of repose and obliged to busy herself with something else than study, seemed as though coming from another world. Her consolations have entirely disappeared, and

³³ 21 novembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ A Mgr. Bouvier, 21 novembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

³⁵ A Mère Marie, 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

discouragement has taken complete possession of her timid soul . . . the slightest circumstance troubles her. I have seen her weep because a piece of linen was lost in the laundry, because a child's bed was badly made, because it rained on a day when she wished dry weather. Everything is arranged now however at the *pensionnat*.³⁶

Most of the distressing lack of accommodations for the pupils which had borne so heavily upon the Sisters during their first month of school had been remedied before the opening of classes in September. The iron beds about which there was so much correspondence had at last arrived, and though the furnishings of the little boarding school were still primitive in a certain sense, the pupils were all of pioneer stock and more or less inured to privations. One of the first cares of the year was the prospectus already outlined in part in the advertisement of the school which had been inserted in the local newspapers. Issued in October and printed probably at the *Wabash Courier* office in Terre Haute, the small double sheet repeated the curriculum stated in the advertisement with further necessary details and terms which were in harmony with the general practice in the Western Country.

CONVENT AND ACADEMY
OF THE
SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE

Near Terre Haute, Vigo County, Indiana.

SISTER THEODORE GUERIN, *Superior*.

The Sisters of Providence occupy a very fine building, newly erected in a retired and healthy situation, four miles from Terre-Haute. They have just opened a BOARDING SCHOOL—several boarders have been admitted, still there is room for a larger number of pupils. Among the Tutoresses provided for this Institution, some are natives of America, others of France and Germany, so that the children of these different nations may find in their teachers the means of perfecting themselves in their own language, and facility in learning the other branches taught in the school. . . .

Each Pupil must be provided at her entrance with at least six summer dresses, and three winter ones, dark colored would be preferred, and suitable to the season, eight changes of linen, eight pairs of stockings, six hand towels, six napkins, at least three night-gowns and night-caps; a dark calico bag, about three-quarters of a yard square, tooth and hair-brushes, fine and coarse combs, and a small drinking cup. . . .

Visits are permitted only from Parents, Guardians, very near relatives, or persons expressly sent by Parents or Guardians, and these visits must be made on Thursdays only, in order not to interrupt the classes. The Pupils themselves are not permitted to visit except in cases of the most urgent nature. . . .

Frequent examinations will be held during the year, to mark the progress of the pupils and to excite emulation among them, after which accounts of the progress, capacity, disposition of each pupil, will be forwarded to the parents or guardians. At the end of the year, an examination will be held, and followed by a distribution of premiums, as an encouragement for the pupils who will distinguish themselves.

Next Spring the Sisters will open a day-school. Day scholars will be taught separately from the boarders:

Charges, per quarter.....\$4.00

October 9, 1841.³⁷

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ S.M.W.A.

A picture of an American school of the forties appeared in a recent American periodical:

Girls in crinoline and frilly pantalets . . . squirmed on long wooden benches. Some classes were shepherded by monitors, bright scholars of the upper grades who filled the teacher shortage of that time . . . slates with squeaky pencils, sponges, colored quill pens, abacuses, alphabet wheels . . . samplers, peaked dunce caps and dunce's high chairs. Handily hung by the teacher's desk were well worn rattan switches. . . . Classes began with . . . the recitation of sixteen rules of conduct including, "I must not tear or break any of the furniture of the school."²⁸

A portrayal of Saint Mary's Female Academy in 1841 is contained in some brief pages of early reminiscences, penned in extreme old age by Jane Brown, who later as Mother Anastasie was the third Superior General of the Sisters of Providence in America and for twenty-two years in the 50's, 60's, and 80's was superior of the Academy. She was the first postulant to enter the novitiate from the Academy.

My early remembrances of Saint Mary's go back to a time prior to the arrival of the Sisters. St. Mary's was one of the few Catholic settlements of the diocese, and Mass was said at long intervals in Thralls's house. I remember visiting the new convent one Sunday after the Sisters came in company with my father, who was already acquainted with Mother Theodore owing to his having furnished the brick for the new Academy. Sister Olympiade, who seemed to be charged with entertaining visitors, met us and conducted us everywhere, showing us in particular the new building of which only the kitchen was finished. She made a very favorable impression despite her imperfect English. When Mother Theodore came to meet us however, I was at once completely won by her amiable manners. She manifested an exquisitely simple cordiality, but when occasion required, she could be a queen in dignity. Knowing of my desire to be a religious, she took me at once to her heart in a way the memory of which is today one of my dearest treasures.

Some time after the Academy opened in September, 1841, my sister and I entered as pupils; our arrival raised the number of students to thirteen. Sister Basilide had succeeded Sister Saint Vincent as superior; she also taught nearly all the classes except English which was in charge of the first Sister Ann Joseph, an American novice, and catechism given by Sister Saint Francis, who also taught drawing. Mother Theodore gave instructions from time to time and took the greatest personal interest in all the classes especially the mathematics.²⁹

One noticeable point in this account is the absence of all mention of Sister Aloysia. Her health had begun to fail early in the school year. Neither her character nor her experience fitted this slender grey-eyed young Sister for the position of authority in charge of the school to which she had been advanced over pupils of varying capacity but especially over teachers of another nation older than herself. By removing Mother Theodore from the scene and placing her in the novitiate, Bishop de la Hailandière had taken away the only influence which could have made for success. Hardly a month after school had opened in July, the Bishop was writing to Mother Theodore:

You will learn from Sister Aloysia that . . . I wrote her a long letter. Will it please her? I do not at all expect it; to please her we would have to find nothing reprehensible in her or hold our peace like a dumb dog. I believe her positively to be

²⁸ *Newsweek*, April 27, 1942, pp. 66-67.

²⁹ "Reminiscences," *The Aurora*, vol. 45, p. 47.

very dangerous, and I have serious fears for her. . . . I do not believe however that flattering her will be the means of curing her. She has been only too much flattered already. Whatever may have been your intentions therefore, my daughter, I do not think you should have gone rarely to the Academy as the best thing to be done—you are the superior—to let her do whatever she will. She is no more the superior than Sister Basilide or Sister Marie Joseph.

And Catherine. She must come back to the novitiate. Sister Olympiade must replace her and carry there the proper spirit of obedience.⁴⁰

Mother Theodore later wrote to Mother Mary a more detailed account of the little boarding school:

We entrusted it to Sister Basilide assisted by our Sister Alouisia, an American, and our good German, Sister Marie Joseph. This arrangement did not succeed at all . . . and Monseigneur, Sister Saint Vincent and I have decided in consideration of the peculiar circumstances to leave the principal direction of the house to me. It was however impossible independently of my poor health to go there often, since dear Sister Saint Vincent occupied herself scarcely more . . . than if she had still been at Fougeray, her only duty, her single task being to study English. We mourned together however over the miseries of the boarding school. We had put Sister Olympiade there to do the cooking, but nothing could bring order in the house. We thought for a time that we should go there either one or the other. Just at this juncture came our retreat which opened the eleventh of August.⁴¹

Though Sister Aloysia's success in the school was not all the Bishop had hoped for, the results were reasonably satisfactory and everyone worked hard to keep the little group of pupils happy and contented.

In September, when Sister Saint Vincent was appointed superior Sister Aloysia resumed her former position. Unfortunately, however, the same difficulties recurred again. On October 29 Mother Theodore recorded in the diary that both Sister Olympiade and Sister Aloysia were ill. Father Buteux's removal at Father Petit's insistence in September, 1841, from his post of confessor had not by that fact removed him from the chaplaincy. He remained at Saint Mary's, and Father Antoine Parret joined him as confessor. Regarding Father Buteux's duties the Bishop had written some eight months earlier:

Mr. Buteux is your chaplain, nothing more. As such, he hears the confessions, and there in the sacred tribunal he gives whatever advice he judges fit. He may not speak in private to any Sister, novice, or postulant. It is not in any way his duty, as he seems to think, to form them otherwise than by the administration of the sacraments. This would be going contrary to your rule. One additional duty, it seems to me is incumbent upon him, that of giving an instruction every week to the Community. At least that is what I recall to my mind. I wish his relations with the Community to go no further than this.⁴²

Neglect on Father Buteux's part to conform to the Bishop's orders it was which eventually led to the loss of Sister Aloysia and to his own removal from Saint Mary's by the Bishop. This failure in obedience brought the result it ordinarily leads to, confusion, suffering, and failure.

We have seen that for months during this time Father Buteux was urging Mother Theodore to retire to make way for a better and more

⁴⁰ 2 août, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴¹ 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴² 11 décembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

gifted superior. She yielded to this pressure and urgently besought Mother Mary to send some more capable person to replace her. At the same time he was forming the plan of his American Community, which was to replace the French Sisters after they had been driven away. Mother Theodore's reiterated requests to retire, however, had already aroused the Bishop's suspicions. He forbade her to leave or even to think of doing so:

I suspected some mystery in all this. If I had not seen it before, I ought now to do so for your letter is a puzzle in whatever way it may be viewed. You refuse to give me the key to it. Nevertheless I may be much nearer to dispelling the mist than you suppose. I have been wide awake for a long time, and for me the angels of the Lord keep watch. May the impostor not be caught in his own snares.⁴³

The Bishop's ideas as to founding a new Community occur in a letter written some months earlier:

I never had the pretension of founding a new Congregation, nor have I said one word to give occasion for such a thought. I wished to see yours established here. God only knows the gratitude I feel towards your Sisters of Ruillé for listening to my request and to you, Mother, and your daughters for having the courage and the spirit of sacrifice to come to us.⁴⁴

Father Buteux had said that he was tired of his duties, and thereupon the Bishop removed him as confessor of the Community. His efforts to destroy the struggling convent at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were not however in any degree checked, but only driven underground. He continued his clandestine relations with the Sisters and won Sister Aloysia over as a confederate in his project of forming a new Community more in harmony with American ideas and of which he would be the head. Ever since he had been in America he had been absent at times on lengthy collecting tours. He left for another similar journey to Saint Louis and New Orleans via Cincinnati, December 3, 1841.

A circumstance which seemed to prove that Father Buteux was not the only one who felt dubious about the success of the establishment at St. Mary's became evident when an anonymous correspondent wrote an alarming letter to Mother Mary at Ruillé. Her ensuing anxious letter of reproof to Mother Theodore thus revealed to the Sisters another phase of the campaign to discourage them and drive them from their forest home:

A person entirely unknown to me but who seems to bear a sincere interest in our Congregation and to be motivated in the measures he undertakes in our regard only by motives of charity writes to us from Cincinnati that the six Sisters we have sent to Vincennes are in the greatest difficulty and suffering, that the superior, Sister Theodore, for unknown motives has not informed us of the facts, and it is to supply for your reserve towards us that the beneficent unknown hazards a few lines to us, considering himself happy if he can contribute to your well being.

What seems to me certain is, that this letter is from a friend with no pretensions other than for the glory of God. But what is to be done in the ignorance in which you leave us regarding your circumstances and your real position? If what we are told is true, should we not reproach you for having written us nothing but romances since you have been in America? For in none of your letters is there mention of suffering or of extraordinary difficulties, the heat and cold of the climate excepted. Otherwise you appeared to be as happy as our Sisters in France,

⁴³ 17 juin, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁴ 11 décembre, 1840. S.M.W.A.

and we rejoiced in the Lord on this account, thanking Divine Providence for it. If you were alone, my dear Theodore, I could more readily forgive the dissimulation which you have practiced towards us. I would have admired your courage in suffering in silence for the love of God all that is most crucifying in the trials and privations of that life. But, if you have the right to be silent concerning your own trials, is it lawful for you under the circumstances to hide from us those which weigh upon your Sisters? I do not think so. On this account I order you, without consulting anyone whatever, by the obedience which you owe us, to inform us of all that concerns you in general and in particular. I wish to know everything, my dear Theodore. Consequently, I oblige you to tell me the whole truth, no matter from what quarter your sufferings and your difficulties may proceed.

I wrote to you by Sister Saint Francis Xavier but little it is true. Yet perhaps too much. I was under the influence of the pain and vexation which you had caused me, no doubt, my dear Theodore, more by indiscretion than ill will; nevertheless, I shall acknowledge that if I had been told [sic] that you were happy in every respect, I had taken the resolution of letting you enjoy your prosperity. But for misfortune, sorrow, and sufferings, I wish always to have compassion; I am moved, therefore, with pity. Open your heart to me; mine awaits you, Heaven having given me one incapable of rancor.

After what you told us of the interest evinced towards you by your Bishop, we supposed you secure from many miseries under his protection; but as we do not know of what kind the trials are which Heaven has sent you, we cannot conjecture anything conclusive upon your situation. Write to us quickly in order to relieve us of the uneasiness into which this letter has thrown us.

Sister Saint Francis must be with you by this time. I regret that she will not be able to be of assistance to you, but this child is in this world only to love God, who asks nothing else of her. She has chosen the better part which shall not be taken away from her. You will see for yourself, my dear Theodore, whether I was mistaken and whether I wished to deceive you. This poor Saint Francis is a child of grace, and I love grace in her; wherever she will be my heart will follow her, but this friendship does not blind me to her meager capacity for good works.

How is your health and that of our Sisters? Tell them from me that I wish each one of them to write me a letter in which she tells me all that concerns herself in particular. Your last letter was from Vincennes dated August 9 in which you announced to us the visit of Mr. Benoit, whom we have not yet seen. I do not know whether he went to Le Mans, but what is certain is that Ruillé has not received him. I do not doubt of the sanctity of your gentlemen in general, but do not trust in any one in particular, because there no doubt the cockle is mixed with the good seed. If some go there in search of souls, there are others who flee from the disgrace which covers them in their own country; for example, the one whom you were so pleased to see again was suspended for a long time. The cause of this measure is unknown to us, but be on your guard. . . .

Have you sent any of yours to the establishments? It seems to me you must have some new foundations by this time in the New World. Where are the Brothers of St. Joseph? Have they also been thrust into the desert to perish from hunger? It is hard for me to believe that placing establishments in a forest is a means to have them succeed. I am awaiting the information which I have asked of you on the customs and the commerce of that country. On what do you live? Do you plant wheat? Do you make butter? and have you milk? It is useless for me to ask; you tell me nothing. Adieu, my dear Theodore. Pray for me and be assured of my sincere friendship.

Your friend,

SISTER MARIE, *Sup. Gen.*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ S.M.W.A.

This alarming letter written from Ruillé on December 10, 1841, was not received at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods till February 25, 1842. Mother Theodore's fourteen closely written pages in reply bear the same date although according to the order in Mother Mary's letter every Sister was to write also at once, and the diary registers the letter only probably when it was sent, March 1.

I have just at this moment received your letter of December 10, and I put aside everything to answer at once. If God had favored me with the extraordinary hardships with which we are credited, I would bless Him with gratitude if He would only lift from my heart the heaviest of my crosses, that of knowing that displeased with me, you had taken the resolution to leave me alone in the forests of America without the hope of ever receiving any consolation from you who are always my too dearly loved Mother. That, yes, Mother, that is the heaviest cross that your daughter can ever have to bear. I acknowledged this only a week ago to Sister Saint Francis in one of those outpourings of the heart of which mine, so weak still beneath the cross, feels the need. But dear Mother, if the favor of being again your daughter, your Theodore, as you have sometimes called me, must be bought by exciting your compassion over sorrows that we do not suffer, I will be compelled to renounce it and renew my sacrifice, for I do not recall ever to have hidden from you knowingly any of our sufferings. Those of which I have not spoken are of common knowledge and have not escaped your maternal solicitude. It is very true that our whole life is one of sacrifice. Who could doubt this? Strangers to the manners and customs, to the religious opinions and especially to the character of the people who surround us, lost in the deep solitudes of Indiana, buried alive as it were in this vast tomb, without doubt, humanly speaking our life is miserable. Obligated to have business relations with a people of whose language we are ignorant and who are noted for their skill in driving sharp bargains and their *penchant* to do so, having in our own house American children, that is, strangers, not only to our ways of acting but even to ordinary Christian conduct, quick to condemn everything contrary to what is done in this country, so proud, so contemptuous, certainly all this puts one to death daily, as it were, from pinpricks.

But, my dear Mother, you know all that so well that you forewarned me of it all yourself before I ever came to America.

Then follows the most detailed account of every aspect of their life, most of which had appeared in earlier letters, their relations with the Bishop, with Father Buteux, the finances of the Community which was already nearly a thousand dollars in debt, the health of the Sisters, the little convent, the disposition of the rooms and their actual condition, especially the chapel, the boarding school, the garden and farm, the domestic animals, the food of Sisters and children and the current prices paid for it, their meals, both ordinary and Lenten, their beds and covering. Passing from the material conditions of their life, the letter described the religious spirit which prevailed among the postulants to which Sister Saint Francis Xavier's example contributed so powerfully, their plans for the future, the employments of the Sisters and their progress in learning English. The letter closes with some data upon the locality and the American customs and character, finishing with detailed information upon the Indian tribes gathered no doubt from Eleanor Bailly, now Sister Mary Cecilia, who when the letter was written had been three months in the novitiate. The last two of the fourteen large pages closely written on the familiar pale bluish foolscap were devoted to the beloved assistant Mother Saint Charles in a sort of résumé of the first part of the letter, and on March 1, enclosing

the confidential letters from all the other Sisters, this large packet was mailed from Terre Haute.

Mother Theodore and her Sisters were too peace-loving and too submissive to the will of God to attempt to discover who had been the cause of this trial. Bishop de la Hailandière was, however, of different mettle. He took the whole occurrence deeply to heart and demanded and received the original letter from Mother Mary. Though absolute proof was lacking, he was convinced that it had been sent by Father Buteux.

During all this time Father Buteux was writing frequently to Saint Mary's in a totally different tone:

It is to you that I write this, my very dear Mother, my daughter, my child, for you have been to me, you still are, all of that. The other pages of this letter, I do not know to whom they were written, I suppose to the Mother Superior. Poor Mother, how are you now? How do you bear your solitude? . . . As for me, I very sincerely believe that both your postulants and your pupils are better off since Sister A[loysia] is no longer in charge of them and everything at Saint Mary's will be, already is, successful since all is under the control of those fitted for the work. I would never speak to any one else as I do to you, very dear daughter, but you know my frankness and that I express my thoughts. I wrote to you from Vincennes all that occurred there which might have some relation to Saint Mary's. I assure you, my dear child, that I shall faithfully keep you informed of all that concerns your work and your plans for the future.⁴⁶

Sister Aloysia's health had given Mrs. Williams in Terre Haute the idea of inviting her to spend the winter there in her home. Naturally the Bishop disapproved of this:

I do not see how it could be useful to our dear Sister Aloysia to spend the winter with Mrs. Williams. What would she find there that she has not with you except the attentions of people of the world? There no priest, no church, no Sisters. What a privation it would be for her. Then, too, that would be entirely contrary to the spirit of your community. Thank Mrs. Williams for her kindness. That is all I can see to be done.⁴⁷

Mother Theodore wrote to France in December, 1841, that Sister Aloysia "has been ill for two months and now concerns herself with nothing."⁴⁸ During all this time, however, a clandestine correspondence had been going on with Father Buteux, and after New Year's, Sister Aloysia approached four of the postulants to induce them to join the projected American Community in the coming spring. At this juncture Mother Theodore set out to consult the Bishop:

I took our little buggy and set out for Vincennes on January 19 in spite of the cold and the snow thickly falling. Wrapped up in an old buffalo skin robe and sheltered by an umbrella, I arrived at the Bishop's house at nine o'clock at night. The next day by way of resting and thawing out, I was most ungraciously received, but His Lordship ended by promising to come.

The circumstances were delicate in the extreme. The Bishop had considered Sister Aloysia essential to the success of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. This action cost Monseigneur very much. He had conducted her, directed her, sent her here to this

⁴⁶ Saint Louis, 13 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁷ 29 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁸ A Mère Marie, 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

place before we came and had given her from the beginning marks of preference and esteem which wounded the others. Yet . . . he was the first to say that she could not remain any longer.⁴⁹

She was therefore dismissed by his Lordship. The Sisters had loved her and were grief-stricken at the turn of affairs, Mother Theodore in particular and Sister Basilide. "No one suffered in this instance as much as Sister Basilide," wrote Mother Theodore. "I thought she would be ill."⁵⁰

Father Buteux's definitive removal from the chaplaincy took place on May 17, 1842. On June 16 following, Bishop de la Hailandière was sending word to Father Martin at Logansport that he would be replaced by Father Buteux, "who has just returned from New Orleans with a rather good sum of money."⁵¹ Father Martin was to be Vicar General and Pastor at Vincennes. In June despite the Bishop's wishes, Father Buteux was again at Saint Mary's, and the diary notes that being ill in Terre Haute, he wrote and begged Mother Theodore to receive him and care for him. "He comes in fact and grows very sick," and stayed until entirely recovered. Relinquishing the idea he had been entertaining of joining the Jesuit order, he returned to Saint Gabriel's College, Vincennes, and was present at the dedication of the church at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on November 10, 1844. He was back again to say goodbye to the Community on January 7, 1845⁵² when he was leaving for Europe where he informed the Holy See of Bishop de la Hailandière's refusal to give him an *exeat* or honorable dismissal from the diocese. He later returned to Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi, locating at last in Boston where he died in 1875. His final request to come back to die at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was granted by Bishop de Saint-Palais, but too late to be put into execution.

How a more painful and momentous termination to the entire affair might have brought disaster to the Community is revealed in a letter from the Bishop to Father Martin whom Father Buteux had reproached for reporting his conduct at Saint Mary's to the Bishop. "You put me in a position not to be deceived any longer. That saved the Sisters."⁵³

The struggling Community at Saint Mary's was to feel however for many a long day the repercussions of Sister Aloysia's leaving them. The June 8 issue of the Terre Haute *Wabash Express* carried the following advertisement:

FEMALE SCHOOL

The subscriber having engaged the services of competent assistants will open a school for young ladies in Terre Haute on Monday the 16th inst. The following are the terms for tuition per quarter of 12 weeks:

For the common branches of English education.....	\$5.00
High English branches.....	7.00
Drawing and Painting.....	5.00
French	4.00
Music	10.00

SUSAN R. WILLIAMS

⁴⁹ A Mère Marie, 26 février, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ S.M.W.A.

⁵² Community Diary.

⁵³ 26 septembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

The little school at Saint Mary's was just getting on its feet. Sister Aloysia's defection was a rude shock. The "novice who by her education and influence," wrote Mother Theodore to Bishop Bouvier, "was the mainstay of our house . . . has opened a school in Terre Haute in competition with ours and has drawn away our pupils. She has taken as associate a Catholic widow of good reputation."⁵⁴ Some of the pupils left, and prospects for the coming year seemed very dark. To Sister Basilide however who was continually with the pupils, Sister Aloysia's loss, so feared and dreaded, eventually seemed to pass without a ripple in the school. These children originally "so terrified by their prejudices" were pronounced by Sister Basilide's "très-aimables."

Among the children whom we had last year some were so prejudiced against our religion that they were hardly willing to listen to the sermons on Sunday. They give us much consolation. . . . I have Catechism regularly for my Catholics and with their instruction I mingle controversy which I am obliged to study. The Catholics are often questioned by the Protestants who are never happier than when they find someone who cannot answer their objections.⁵⁵

Many details of the boarding school established in 1841 continued traditional for many years: the late afternoon collation of cookies or French biscuits or bread and sugar, and the seven o'clock supper, the devotion to fine needlework, which the American pupils acquired from the deft and skillful French teachers, and the long walks in the woods and outdoor games for recreation. The close and devoted surveillance, which was part of the French educational tradition, was characteristic of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from the beginning. The Sisters were constantly in their pupils' company, winning their hearts first as their Rule counseled and required, then guiding and influencing them for their best interests. In those remote days means of relaxation were few, and the Sisters were ingenious in devising ways of keeping their pupils interested and amused.

A detailed record of one of the holidays of that momentous year has come down to us as it was written probably by Sister Mary Cecilia and printed in the *Wabash Express*. The two national holidays of that day, Washington's Birthday and July 4, were celebrated with spontaneous enthusiasm by American girls most of whose fathers had been contemporary with Washington's later years. Patriotism was a strong and enthusiastic current in their lives, and Independence Day an opportunity to express their love of country.

It not being convenient for the young ladies to join with the citizens of Terre Haute in commemorating this memorable day, they concluded to celebrate it by themselves and accordingly appointed Mr. Parret, chaplain, Miss Matilda Richardson, Reader of the Declaration of Independence; Miss Anne E. Law, Oratress of the day, Miss P. A. Holmes, President, and Miss Mary Farrington, Vice President.⁵⁶

As was the general custom in America at that time, the Independence Day celebration took place under the trees where "a stage beautifully decorated with evergreens having been erected for the Oratress and Reader, the

⁵⁴ 6 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁵ Sister Basilide à Mère Marie, 29 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁶ *Wabash Express*, July 20, 1841.

ceremonies of the day commenced at half past eleven o'clock by music from the choir; secondly, reading of the Declaration of Independence; thirdly, Oration; fourthly, Hail Columbia by the choir; fifthly, Benediction by the chaplain." No doubt some parents and friends had assembled to join in the celebration, and "the company then repaired in procession to the dining hall where a public dinner was served up for the occasion" by the Sisters.

Miss Farrington afterwards presided at the following toasts:

By Miss Law—Liberty: May she ever continue to unfurl her glorious banner over the United States.

By Miss Matilda Richardson—The Institution of St. Mary's: May it prosper and send a sweet benign influence over the vicinity in which it is situated.

By Miss Mary Farrington—Our Country: Success to all her undertakings and a continued increase of happiness to her inhabitants.

By Miss Mary Richardson—Our President of the Day: Success to her and may she prove one of America's sweetest flowers.

By Miss H. Jenckes—The young Ladies of St. Mary's: May they ever be as happy in the enjoyment of Independence as they are this day.

By Miss E. Kelley—The United States: May they ever shine with unblemished luster.

By Miss J. Kelley—Our Parents: May they be as happy this day as their absent daughters.

By Miss Mary A. Sturgeis—Our Oratress: May she be a flower to society and a source of much happiness to her friends.

By Miss S. Lalumiere—Saint Mary's and the Sisters: Prosperity to the one, and happiness to the other.

By Miss E. Lalumiere—The Young Ladies: May they continue to increase in amiability and loveliness.

By Miss Holmes—Mother Theodore: May she ever possess the affection of her children, and be as happy as she deserves and as the warm hearts of her pupils can desire.

By Miss Law—The Heroes of the Revolution:

By Miss Richardson—Our Young Friends at Home: May they enjoy this day and be truly independent.

By Miss Kelley—Our Teachers:

By Miss Holmes—Our companion who is deprived of the pleasure of this day by sickness: May she soon cheer us again by her presence and enjoy again the blessings of health.

After dinner the young ladies took a ride to the river, and the beautiful banner which gracefully waved its stripes and stars above their heads, plainly told that they were truly, and indeed, independent.

At early candlelighting, the young ladies returned to their domicile, where they concluded the celebration by a cheerful dance.⁵⁷

This elaborate celebration for the little frontier school with its handful of pupils was a direct outcome of Mother Theodore's own devotion to her adopted country.

Mother Theodore had a strong patriotic spirit, wrote Mother Anastasie. While she loved her native country most tenderly, she gave her heart at once to the land of her adoption. As early as 1842 she had us pupils celebrate the national festival (4th

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

of July) with recitations commemorative of our Independence and kindred subjects. To instill patriotism into us was a duty with her next to that of religion. We were required to be familiar with the history of our Country and with the great deeds of those who had made our nation illustrious.⁵⁸

Hardly a month later on August 3 came the first Commencement. Weeks of preparation preceded the great occasion. "Tomorrow the *distribution des prix* will take place," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Ruillé to Mother Mary. "For the last month Sister Basilide has been overwhelmed with work on the compositions. This is the first year of our poor little house."⁵⁹ The closing exercises were preceded by a public examination conducted by invited gentlemen from Terre Haute. Mother Anastasie's reminiscences give us a picture of the demure little group of frontier young ladies seated in a semi-circle their hair brushed back from their clear brows. They wore small black silk aprons donned for the occasion to go through the ordeal of the examination, which was *de rigueur* afterwards for many years. Mother Theodore was pleased with the results. "The children answer well," she wrote in the diary, but she was disappointed in the audience for the Commencement. The cloud of intolerance which was sweeping the country was intensifying the animus in Terre Haute against their school. "Almost all the persons invited sent excuses and did not come. Rev. Mr. Parret being absent, Mr. John Dowling improvised a very good address." The Sisters and the postulants were present. Sister Saint Francis Xavier alone remained at home to finish the long and urgent letter to France begun the day before:

While all the Sisters and the postulants are at the children's distribution I am alone in our little wooden house writing to you, my dear Mother St. Charles. Mine is not the worst part. I am growing as shy as an old wolf in the depths of the woods.⁶⁰

Mother Anastasie recalled details of a program of one of these first years:

At the close of the year in August the *distribution des prix* took place on the Academy porch. We presented a play translated from the French. I remember the names of only two of the girls who figured in it, Mary Jane Kelly and her sister Elizabeth. The latter in the fervor of histrionic enthusiasm accidentally struck a basket held by some one else on the improvised stage. The unlucky basket broke from its moorings and flying out into the audience, struck Judge Huntington, the orator of the occasion. I recall very well to this day the hearty laugh that rang through the assembly. A number of prizes were given, among them, two crowns of artificial flowers, made under Sister Saint Francis's direction and awarded for good behavior." Mary Jane Kelly received one, and I had the privilege of drawing, though unsuccessfully, for the other.⁶¹

The fourth vow of devotion, which was customary in the Community for many years after the American foundation, required of the Sisters an "elevated idea of the value of souls redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ and a burning desire to contribute to their sanctification by a tender, compassionate, attentive and generous zeal."⁶² The American

⁵⁸ Reminiscences.

⁵⁹ 2 août, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁰ 3 août, 1842. A Mère St. Charles.

⁶¹ The *Aurora*, vol. 45, p. 308.

⁶² Rule of 1835, p. 34.

children were very affectionate, but filled with the independence which still characterizes them. The Sisters found them, as Sister Saint Francis remarked, not mischievous yet difficult to manage. But the motherly kindness, the politeness and consideration of the Sisters soon changed them completely. Their manners naturally left much to be desired.

If I had time I would give a sketch of the manners of these Americans, so calm and cold and thoughtful. For although the women are vain and puerile like all others of their sex, their exterior is very different. The other day I thought if Pepa⁶³ had come here in her young days, she would have been shown in the large cities as a curiosity; for even I pass as a phoenix of politeness. In this country people are seemingly as cold as winter.⁶⁴

The American girls assimilated readily however the lessons of politeness of their new teachers and eventually took on that distinctive note of convent training, which at its best combines lofty and unyielding moral principles with exquisite grace and charm of manner. The Sisters loved their woodland and their work. Their adopted country and its children had the same place in their hearts as their beloved France. Eventually through many crosses their work was to prove an immense boon to the Church of Indiana.

⁶³ Her elder sister who later devoted her life to her uncle's orphan children.

⁶⁴ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 210.

CHAPTER IX

EDUCATIONAL EXPANSION

FIRST MISSIONS — JASPER, ST. FRANCISVILLE, VILLAGE SCHOOL, 1842

"In the education of children two virtues are essential, justice and kindness."

MOTHER THEODORE

OUR eldest daughter," "our first establishment," "child of our predilection," "this dear mission,"—it is thus in the reiterated terms of maternal interest and affection that Mother Theodore refers in her correspondence to the first mission undertaken by the Sisters of Providence in America. The rapidly growing German settlement of Jasper, only a few miles off the old Buffalo Trace in southern Indiana, set in the midst of magnificent hardwood forests on a little woodland river, the Patoka, thirty-five miles north of the Ohio, had received in 1838 a dynamic pastor in the person of the Reverend Joseph Kundek, a twenty-eight-year-old Austrian priest, but two years ordained to the priesthood. Jasper lies within the confines of the old Vincennes Grant, first and oldest concession from the Indians to the French in Indiana, a gift cession to the Vincennes colonists, which covered over a million and a half acres. The entire southern part of the state, long the haunt of Piankeshaws, Delawares, and Shawnees had in 1842 for over twenty-five years been given over to white settlers crossing the Ohio from Kentucky. The location was ideal for agriculture, once the forest was cleared.

The original colonists of Jasper were not however Catholic. In 1834 though a hundred and fifty wagons passed over the Buffalo Trace in two weeks,¹ only a few Catholics were located in Jasper, nor does it appear among the places listed by Bishop Bruté on his initial scouting journeys over his new diocese. The first purchasers of patents² for the site of Jasper were a family of brothers named Enlow, and the wife of one of them it was, Eleanor Enlow, who when there was question of calling the embryo town for her, substituted the name of Jasper from the description of the heavenly Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of Saint John. In 1839 the parish counted ninety families. At that time the first German families from overseas reached the vicinity, and subsequent arrivals in the following year brought their number to sixty.³ Though the pioneer Catholic group came from Baden, later arrivals were from all over Germany, Bavaria, Hesse, Wurttemberg, north Germany, and even Alsace-Lorraine and Switzerland, and

¹ George R. Wilson, "Early Indiana Trails and Surveys" (*Ind. Hist. Soc. Pub.*, vol. 6, no. 3), p. 379.

² The large deeds from the United States Government signed by the Presidents were called patents.

³ Rev. Albert Kleber, O.S.B., *Saint Joseph's Parish, Jasper, Indiana* (Saint Meinrad Abbey, Indiana, 1937), pp. 20, 22.

the founders of the celebrated Benedictine Abbey of Saint Meinrad near Jasper in the 1850's were Swiss monks.

The early German colonists of Jasper suffered untold hardships on the long sea voyage. Many traveled in the worst season of the year for ocean travel, braving the cold and privations of steerage passage in the crowded old-time sailing ships and buffeted by the fierce storms of the winter Atlantic. Months on the ocean broke their strength, and on several occasions cholera wiped out whole families who were buried at sea. A permanent monument to the courage but also to the incredible sufferings of these early German settlers stands today in the Jasper churchyard in the tall stone cross erected in fulfillment of a vow made by Jasper emigrants en route to America during a violent storm in 1847. These sturdy German farmers were, however, the best type of colonists for the rapidly growing state of Indiana. Their first stopping place was usually Cincinnati where they looked about for a desirable location. Once arrived in the woods on the Patoka, they quietly went about clearing the forest and building homes.

Bishop Bruté visited them in September, 1837, and as he wrote "wept bitter tears" that he was unable to preach to them and hear their confessions.⁴ Not until late in 1838 was he able to send them a German-speaking priest. Their first missionary had been the young French priest, Maurice de Saint-Palais, who had accompanied Bishop Bruté to America in 1836. A group of pioneer log churches had sprung up in Daviess County, where so many Catholic Kentuckians had settled. The Bishop was now desirous of replacing these pioneer churches with more durable structures. He had given Father de Saint-Palais charge of two of these early churches, Saint Mary's and Mount Pleasant, and occasionally the zealous young priest made the long horseback trip through the thick forest across the White River to Petersburg and east over the well worn Buffalo Trace to say Mass in a private house at Jasper.

After September, 1838, however, the tall princely form and patrician features of this French nobleman were seen no more by the honest farmers of Jasper. They looked instead upon the bearded Slavonian countenance and bright blue eyes of the young Croat from Austria, whose quick perceptions missed no detail of his parishioners' ways and needs and whose lengthy exhortations in the Viennese dialect were to guide their lives for nearly twenty years. He was from the old Catholic nation of Croatia, then part of Austria but incorporated into Yugoslavia after the first World War. Father Joseph Kundek's career as pastor of Jasper was that of a human dynamo of energy and zeal. One of his best points was the acumen with which he extracted surprising results from his meager resources.

The Jasper colonists had no material wealth. Only brawn and spirit were theirs, courage to conquer the hardships of the wilderness and their grand old German faith, their best heritage from their rugged fatherland. During the first year all the pioneer settler could hope for was to produce enough foodstuffs to tide him over the ensuing winter, but corn grew rapidly in the fertile soil, and the second frontier necessity, pork, was matured and fattened practically without care on the abundant mast of the forest. Thus in a second or third season the farmer began to have a

⁴ Godecker, *Simon Bruté de Rémur*, p. 325.

surplus. In Jasper when Father Kundek arrived, while his people were poor and ready money was scarce, yet a considerable number of the families had preceded him by several years and were in a position to contribute produce from their farms to the support of religion.

With characteristic foresight and energy the young priest began to acquire farm land from the Enlows and other earlier non-Catholic owners with money from the Vienna Leopoldine Society. This was put under cultivation for his support. He then advertised for German Catholic colonists, who responded within a few years in such numbers as to transform the town and its environs into a typical Old World district in which the good old German Catholic customs and spirit took root and thrived.

Father Kundek's plans for the improvement of the parish began to show tangible results in 1840 however, when from brick made on the premises the Church of Saint Joseph at Jasper rose rapidly from its foundations. Labor and materials were contributed by the parishioners, and the work continued so successfully that Bishop de la Hailandière could dedicate the edifice on December 8, 1841. The pastor described the Slavonic magnificence of the celebration for the readers of the Cincinnati German Catholic weekly, *Der Wahrheits-Freund*.⁵ A cavalcade of horsemen rode eight miles through the forest to meet the Bishop, volleys of rifle fire rent the air, and a procession of children, now more numerous than the whole parish had been when he arrived, assembled at the "nuns' convent" and took an active part in the ceremonies. This account reveals also that not only had the indefatigable pastor succeeded within the three years of his incumbency in building a large, suitable, and substantial church, but he had also provided accommodations for a Sisters' school and was looking forward to securing both Sisters and Brothers. The Bishop was very much impressed:

I have been to Mr. Kundek's and have blessed his church. I have seen the place destined for the Brothers and have visited the house for the Sisters. Everything is really well done, and I do not doubt that this congregation will become within a few years one of the most flourishing in the diocese. The Sisters' house is particularly nice. They will have a garden, an orchard, a meadow, and ground for cultivation. What more could be desired? Yes, certainly you must answer him if he has written to you.⁶

Not till 1843 did the self-sacrificing pastor think of constructing a log cabin rectory for himself.

Negotiations between Father Kundek and Mother Theodore had begun in fact much earlier, and his previous achievements considered, perhaps it is not surprising that this whirlwind young Croatian priest rather than one of her own French compatriots was the first to secure religious teachers from the embryo motherhouse at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. His name appears in the Bishop's correspondence with Mother Theodore as early as September, 1841. In December of the same year she was writing to France:

Three months ago an establishment was offered us which Monseigneur wished us to accept immediately, but we represented to him the imprudence of undertaking too much at once. We must let God work, supply our house first, and then give only of

⁵ January 13, 1842

⁶ A Mother Theodore, 19 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

our abundance. He did not insist, and it is agreed that we will send Sisters there only in the spring if we can.⁷

Mother Mary had expected evidently more rapid development. "Have you sent any of your Sisters to the establishments?" she inquired. "It seems to me you must have some new foundations by this time in the New World."⁸ Mother Theodore, however, had the prudence and the grace to proceed slowly.

Father Kundek was not the first of the Indiana missionaries to request a colony of Sisters for his parish. One of the French priests had preceded him. The Reverend Augustin Martin located many miles north of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on the Wabash at Logansport had asked Mother Theodore for Sisters early in 1841.⁹ He was endeavoring to maintain a small school at the Bishop's suggestion "if only to form young men for the priesthood."¹⁰ Father Martin was a compatriot of the members of the little colony of Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and preached their first two retreats. Mother Theodore was unable however to give him Sisters so soon, and he contemplated applying to another order for teachers. "You will not get them for two reasons:" wrote the Bishop, "(1) they have no Sisters available; (2) they want only establishments with assured means of support."¹¹ The American orders of Sisters were already resolved upon the necessity of insuring adequate maintenance for the Sisters upon their missions, and the struggling parish of Logansport could provide as yet but meagerly for its zealous pastor.

Father Martin had sent the first postulant who entered the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods after the arrival of the Sisters, Catherine Doyle, in religion Sister Mary Philomene. Later he sent two others, Mary Ann Graham, named for him Sister Augustine, one of the foundresses of the mission of Saint Francisville, and Catherine Doyle's sister Mary, later known as Sister Lucy, who arrived at the novitiate September 27, 1842, and later for many years was infirmarian at the Academy. The two Doyle brothers, William and Philip, entered the seminary about the same time and eventually became priests of the diocese. After Father Martin's transfer to Vincennes that same year, where he became Vicar General and eventually superior of the seminary, there was naturally no further discussion of Sisters for Logansport.

The mission of Jasper had been formally accepted however in October, 1841, at a meeting of the Particular Council and the decision recorded in the minutes. Father Kundek's request for three Sisters was granted. "In consideration of the fact that this establishment will furnish us with the means of beginning our holy mission in this wilderness, we have accepted it by way of trial, but nothing else has been determined."¹² Father Kundek promised a "suitable house and maintenance," nothing more. The practice of the American orders of Sisters already engaged in education in the United States was to require definite assurance of support for the Sisters,

⁷ A Mère Marie, 3 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁸ A Mother Theodore, 10 novembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁹ Mgr. de la Hailandière à Rev. A. Martin, 17 avril, 1841. S.M.W.A.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10 août, 1840. S.M.W.A.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29 avril, 1841.

¹² Minutes of Particular Council, October 15, 1841.

and the French Rule of the Sisters of Providence required a contract and an adequate revenue fixed in advance. The poverty of the struggling Indiana pastors made these requirements difficult if not impossible as yet, and all Mother Theodore expected was that her Sisters would share the poverty and hardships of their pioneer beginnings. Father Kundek had announced the opening of his school with a flourish in the *Wahrheits-Freund*. No doubt he also wrote the somewhat pretentious advertisement which accompanied his announcement:

GIRLS' BOARDING SCHOOL

AT

JASPER, DUBOIS COUNTY, INDIANA

The Sisters of Providence, four in number, have taken over the education of girls in the English, the French, and the German language. . . . The course will include all branches that are taught in any institution in America.

After praising the beautiful scenery, the healthful climate, and so forth, he states that the price of board and tuition will be \$75 a year; extra charges will be made for lessons in music, in painting, and in drawing. Pupils from the age of ten to eighteen will be admitted. The beginning was set for March 21, 1842.¹⁸

Their first venture in the American missionary field decided upon, the next step was to select the faculty. Mother Theodore's first choice was the bi-lingual Alsatian novice from Strasbourg, Sister Marie Joseph, eldest of the four postulants who had been awaiting the group of French Sisters when they arrived on that memorable October evening nearly seventeen months earlier. Without this German-speaking Sister, who spoke French and also now knew the English language fairly well, the mission in Father Kundek's parish would have been impossible. No other teaching Sister was familiar with the German language. She had been employed at the *pensionnat* as soon as it opened in July, 1841, but now, three weeks before the departure of the missionary colony for Jasper, she was recalled to the convent for a short period of intensive preparation under Mother Theodore's direction for her new duties. The second teacher was to be Sister Gabriella Moore, the young widow from Pennsylvania whom Father Varela had sent to the novitiate over a year earlier. She was an Irishwoman and would have charge of the English classes.

Mother Theodore had persuaded Father Kundek not to open his school till the parish patronal feast, Saint Joseph's day, and now daily at intervals stolen from her duties within the convent and out of doors, she gathered all her daughters round the dining table in the little Community room for those practical lessons in pedagogy which were given by her regularly to the Sisters during all the early years. Their copy of Messire de la Salle's *Conduite des Ecoles Chrétiennes* was the foundation of these lessons as the Rule required, but seventeen years of successful experience in the schools of France had given to Mother Theodore a wealth of practical knowledge which was now at the disposal of her Sisters. Thorough training

¹⁸ Quoted in Rev. Albert Kleber, O.S.B., *St. Joseph Parish, Jasper, Ind.*, p. 28.

of the children in their religion and its duties was to be supplemented by instruction in the presence of God, the French motto, "God sees me," to be kept in full view of the pupils at all times at the top of the homemade blackboards.

To serve as guide and monitor to the two teachers who were going to Jasper she had decided to send one of the French Sisters as superior. Her original choice had been Sister Basilide, as she mentioned when in January, 1842, she wrote to her kind friend and protector, Bishop Bouvier, a letter enumerating their blessings and her plans for the future:

No doubt you think of us before God, for if you and our dear friends in France had not prayed could we be so visibly under the protection of heaven? Would we have grown so rapidly? Hardly fifteen months have passed since we arrived in this profound solitude, poor foreigners, having not a stone on which to lay our heads, obliged to accept the hospitality of a family of laborers as poor as we, who had the charity to share with us their miserable cabin.

Well, today we have a brick house and the same cabin restored, which serves as novitiate, and there twelve candidates are preparing to become some day the spouses of Jesus Christ and as daughters of His holy Infancy to share the poverty of His manger. Our boarding school counted seventeen pupils, and we still have fifteen. . . . We are going to accept an establishment which will require three Sisters. It will open on Saint Joseph's day, and we expect to entrust it to Sister Basilide. Pray that God may bless us if we are to procure His glory, but that we melt away like the snow if we are to scandalize these poor Americans, so weak in the faith.¹⁴

As Sister Basilide was now succeeding very well as first mistress of the boarding school, a post in which she had replaced Sister Aloysia, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer was selected for the position of superior at Jasper. The French Sisters, although in general slow in conquering the difficulties of the English language, and on that account of less value as teachers, made as a rule good local superiors, in which employment the American Sisters were not in general successful. Mother Theodore had remarked this fact very early and attributed it to the different training and pursuits of the American women of that day, who did not engage in business as women did in France and were not therefore either by tradition or custom trained to management and commerce as French middle class women so generally were. Mother Theodore herself was to accompany the little colony to Jasper, and install them in their new situation. This was her invariable procedure as each new house opened.

While still engaged daily in coaching and encouraging her little band of prospective missionaries, Mother Theodore wrote of her plans for Jasper to Mother Mary:

No, Mother, we have no establishments yet in our poor Indiana. We wish to form our subjects a little before sending them out; if it is important to have the spirit of one's state before going on mission in France, much more important is it to have it here where only grace can help us to do good. Yet, my good Mother, on the nineteenth of next month, feast of our glorious Father Saint Joseph, the Saturday of Passion Week, day devoted to honoring the Passion of our Divine Saviour and consecrated for centuries to the cult of the Blessed Virgin, this day, I say, is chosen for the installation of our Sisters at Jasper, a little town forty miles on the other side of Vincennes. . . .

¹⁴ 15 janvier, 1842. S.M.W.A.

We are sending there Sister Marie Joseph, who is German. She is a trustworthy daughter of solid piety and very good judgment. We are giving her as companion an Irish Sister, who knows English well and has made astounding progress during the thirteen months she has been here. These dear daughters have no idea whatever of the way to conduct a religious house or a school; so Sister Saint Vincent will go to train them for some months. She will return for the retreat, which will take place in August, and we will then give another Sister to Sister Marie Joseph, who will remain as the superior. This is what we propose to do; the good God may make us pursue another course by sending unforeseen events.¹⁵

The Sisters were to leave Saint Mary's on March 14. The packet *Juniata*, "a roomy steamboat all in state rooms," was announced in January in the *Wabash Courier* to run regularly and to be at the Terre Haute pier "at the earliest rise of the river." This packet or one of its sister steamboats was to take the Sisters to Vincennes, where Father Kundek was to meet them and conduct them the rest of the way to Jasper. The spring thaws were turning the roads to seas of mud. The great National Road was announced as "nearly impassable,"¹⁶ and the mails were very irregular. The Bishop's letter which reached them before they left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was not very encouraging to the travelers:

VINCENNES, March 11, 1842.

VERY WORTHY DAUGHTER,

Mr. Kundek has not yet arrived, and yet he should have been here two days ago. I suppose it was impossible to cross the White River. I started with Mr. Shawe to Jasper today by a road we thought easier than the one Mr. Kundek must have taken. We could not get there. We would have had to swim our horses for about two miles, and we came back here for the night.

From this I think that if you can reach Terre Haute and take the steamboat the first of next week, you might come. During this time the rivers will fall, and you will probably be able to get to Jasper. All this is rather for your Sisters than for you. I think nevertheless that if you do come, you might take the same route.

A bientôt then,

Your devoted servant,

✠ CEL., Bp. of Vinc.¹⁷

The Wabash, out of its banks at Terre Haute, had not been so high for ten years. This fact meant greater difficulty farther south where its tributaries, the White River and the Embarras, were sure to be impassable. The Sisters set out, however, with high courage. Mother Theodore has left a detailed account of this first of her numerous missionary journeys, a prototype of many which followed, its privations and hardships typical of the period in Indiana. In 1842 no railroad available from Saint Mary's for another ten years, no canal boats from Terre Haute as yet, steamboats on the river only at certain times of the year, winter and spring, which were the worst for travel, no bridge over the Wabash, and only the stage coaches along Indiana's frightful roads to be counted upon for transportation. Driven probably by Logan, his axe stowed safely inside the conveyance always to cut away small trees and saplings from the route, the party of four set out from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for the Wabash. Unlike the

¹⁵ 26 février, 1842. S.M.W.A.

¹⁶ *Wabash Courier*, March 2, 1842.

¹⁷ S.M.W.A.

present road, which follows the terrace or second level of high ground to West Terre Haute and crosses the Wabash bottom on a finely constructed causeway far above ordinary flood limits, the old River Road wound diagonally across the bottom, submerged whenever the erratic river left its shallow banks.

We left Providence in the Woods on the 14th in a cart that is called a wagon, similar to our tumbrels. Arrived at the Wabash River, we found it out of its banks, and about two miles wide. We had to cross over between trees in a little Indian canoe, which could take us only half way as the water had gone down; then to get to the river, we had to walk through mud into which we sank half way to our knees; at the end we were in a sorry plight, as you can imagine. Shortly afterwards, we took a steamboat that got us to Vincennes in a few hours. We left there the following Thursday in two carriages, one of which broke down five or six miles out. As it was the one in which I was riding, I was very happy to accept a place in the *stage* (a kind of diligence in our country). It was almost filled with Protestant women, who gave me black looks and whose brows my poor English caused to wrinkle from time to time. We became acquainted, however, and by the time we reached Washington we were friends. There the other Sisters met me.

The Bishop, Father Chassot [Chassé] and a German Seminarian not yet ordained, arrived there soon afterwards. The next day they hired a carriage for us and the little baggage we were carrying. The Bishop mounted his horse, and Sister Saint Vincent, a little girl, and I got into our conveyance, while Sister Marie Joseph and Sister Gabriella went in a wagon. We had for driver-conductor a good German, an excellent Catholic, who knew however no more English than we did; nevertheless, we were as proud as Artaban and we laughed at our poor Sisters who were ahead of us. That was not for long, however; soon we were in the woods, and we lost our road guides who were the ladies I mentioned. The way was frightful. Our driver, to avoid a hole, took a wrong direction, something which is so easy to do in these pathless forests. He saw his mistake too late.

We could not go back, for the carriage tracks had disappeared under the leaves, or under the water which covered all the bottoms. The woods became so dense that we could not see two steps ahead of us. In the way that we had to follow there appeared from time to time some tracks of a wagon that had passed through, knocking down a multitude of small trees. A greater number of large ones had been felled. These we kept close to in the hope of coming to houses. In fact, after a few minutes, we did spy a *log house*, which we approached in the hope that we might find someone who could show us the way out of this labyrinth. But it was a vain hope. There had been someone there, but the cabin was now deserted. All we could do was to try another direction. Soon another hut came to view, but it also was empty. The farther we penetrated into the forest, the more the route became impenetrable. The heat was as stifling as in July at home. Our horses were exhausted.

Hunger, also, tormented us. We had been told we would be at Jasper for dinner, hence we were fasting, as they say in this country, having taken only a little milk in the morning. It was already late. One could not tell whether any human being had ever lived in this profound solitude. Farther and farther away we saw trees blackened or struck down by lightning; an infinite number of others had fallen from old age, and were piled one upon the other. From time to time we came to creeks, little rivers through which we had to pass. The horses were in water to their bellies. Astray, we proceeded without meeting a living creature other than squirrels, which were numerous, rabbits, and birds. Having crossed a swamp we finally saw some troughs coarsely hewn out under fine sugar trees. That gave us unbounded pleasure especially when we saw a house on a little hill. But the joy did not last long, for again there was no one there. We had to keep going. With great difficulty we reached the bank of a river, which was so steep that the water seemed twenty-five or thirty feet below. It was a

real precipice. We had to halt. Poor Sister Saint Vincent felt more like crying than laughing. We prayed with all our might to our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and the Angels.

While we were waiting there, not knowing what was going to become of us nor what to do next, we suddenly heard the strokes of hammers and hatchets. Our driver left us and went in the direction of the sounds. He found some men who were constructing a *flat-boat*, a kind of flat ship that is used on the rivers here. One of them had the kindness to come on horseback and show us the route. He led us through ways no carriage had ever traveled. We found in this new direction, troops of young horses that looked wild. We encountered rather high mountains, large streams, and waterfalls. With the aid of our guide, at last we got to the river and a little later we arrived at Jasper, where our good Bishop and the priests were very much disquieted about us. Monseigneur had gone down to the ship and not finding us, had dismounted and prayed the Blessed Virgin to guide us out of these vast forests. It was at the same hour wherein we found our boat makers. All together we thanked God for the assistance He had given us, and then we went to our supper, of which we had great need.¹⁸

When they left Vincennes the Sisters hardly expected the tour of southern Indiana which circumstances forced upon them. At Jasper their installation was the occasion of one of Father Kundek's public festivals.¹⁹ They were met with music and banners. A procession of the Blessed Sacrament in which the Bishop officiated advanced under rustic arches of foliage and flowers, and the rich plumage of singing birds imprisoned in baskets among the leaves added color and variety to the scene. Sixty pupils were awaiting them.

Prejudice was not absent from Jasper however, and hampered the first efforts of the Sisters, but success attended their labors, and soon Protestants too were happy to send their daughters to the "nuns' convent" on Tenth and Main Streets. Father Kundek expected a considerable increase of non-Catholics as the parents' satisfaction became more generally known. He wrote to Mother Theodore in June, lauding his school and his faculty in glowing words. Sister Saint Vincent, so hesitant and timid when in charge of the boarding school at Saint Mary's, was now more in her element. She had been local superior in France of a somewhat similar school. Father Kundek's esteem for her made Mother Theodore loath to withdraw her at the time of the retreat as she had intended. "Sister Saint Vincent," he wrote in his characteristic English, "seems to be a veteran one of your society, of course well selected to establish a house of yours. . . . For the German one [Sister Marie Joseph] her countrymen do not want better. She gained all of them."²⁰

Despite his earnestness and zeal the Sisters at Jasper had both now and later many spiritual privations. He was often absent thus depriving them of the precious helps of Mass and Holy Communion.

The Sisters feel some dryness in their spiritual life, he wrote, but I cannot help it. I am alone, very much exhausted, having two large congregations to attend. But the Easter time is out. I hope I will be able to dispose of my time more for Jasper. Tho' I aver my principle is, "The Congregations are essential to me," but still I direct my

¹⁸ A Mère Marie, mercredi saint, 1842. S.M.W.A.

¹⁹ Alerding, *History of Vincennes Diocese*, p. 581.

²⁰ To Mother Theodore, June 8, 1842. S.M.W.A.

right eye to the Sisters, too, considering them in a special manner as my spiritual children,—but they know that they are on a mission, and that is my consolation.²¹

This good pastor, however, was greatly opposed to the Sisters' leaving Jasper for the retreat in August at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. He felt that an absence of a few weeks would work great injury to the school. The labor of the mission was considerable, and hardships many, and eventually Sister Saint Vincent's health failed. In August she had been confined to her bed for some weeks. The Bishop therefore dispensed her from the retreat, and the other Sisters missed it also. This circumstance must have been a disappointment to Mother Theodore for to Sisters engaged in the wearing and distracting duties of the missions, an annual retreat is a *sine qua non*.

Mother Theodore regretted the absence of the Sisters from the retreat for other reasons. One was that Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, though pious and devout, often made the yoke of her authority unduly felt by her two subordinates, both mature women though still novices in the religious life. They needed the spiritual help and relaxation afforded by the retreat and the sojourn among their Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Both Mother Theodore and Father Kundek tried from time to time to help Sister Saint Vincent to realize this unfortunate failing though without great success. Some years later Mother Theodore in a confidential letter to Mother Mary tells of a spiritual conference with Sister Saint Vincent in which with French impressionableness they both lamented with tears their faults and shortcomings in the service of *le bon Dieu*. Mother Theodore took occasion to extract a promise from her friend and daughter to be more gentle and sympathetic in future with her Sisters. She was called away, and as she remained an unusually long time, Mother Theodore followed her to the kitchen. Opening the door she discovered Sister Saint Vincent reproving with her usual heat the Sister cook because in making order after the meal she had left the *torchon*²² out of place. Sister considered the offense of great magnitude and yet, said Mother Theodore, the cook is a child of sixteen, who teaches a roomful of children all day and in the intervals of her spiritual exercises takes her turn as cook.

In September Sister Saint Vincent was in Vincennes, not seriously ill but requiring Dr. Baty's care. "Your dear Sister Saint Vincent seems highly pleased at Jasper," wrote Mother Theodore to Mother Mary, "and the priest is satisfied with her." Father Kundek wrote that Sister Gabriella's girls were advancing rapidly and she "hath need to perfection herself" and owing to the "Sisters' preoccupation with worldly things especially in the kitchen" that "a converse Sister or a maid" would be among their future necessities. Mother Theodore made a special trip to Vincennes in September to see Sister Saint Vincent, who had been there under Dr. Baty's care. Unfortunately she had already returned to Jasper, but Father Sorin was there from Saint Peter's and returned with Mother Theodore for a brief visit at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The success of the Brothers in the New World was a great consolation to the Sisters, and their prayers and good wishes followed Father Sorin and his Community four months later when they transferred to Notre Dame.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² dish cloth.

The school continued to prosper, and both the Bishop and Father Kundek as well as the parents were well pleased with the progress of the children. Monseigneur's proposition of removing Sister Gabriella, however, and replacing her by Sister Mary Celestia did not meet with the pastor's approval. He watched over the school carefully, but its needs could be supplied only gradually, and his often expressed wish for a music teacher Mother Theodore was unable to grant for several years. Music teachers were long a desideratum in the Community.

Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer both now and later wrote to Mother Theodore only at long intervals. The following letter was written to Mother Saint Charles at Ruillé some months after the Sisters left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and gives details of her illness and of the general character of the duties of the mission:

PROVIDENCE OF JASPER

October 3, 1842

MY GOOD AND WORTHY SISTER,

If I have not answered your letter and if I have kept silence so long, do not attribute it, I beg of you, to indifference. I can assure you that I have never forgotten nor will I ever forget my worthy and beloved Mothers. How could I forget those who never forget me and who have always had for me a tender, sincere, and disinterested charity. It would truly not be in my power, for my thoughts, and my heart turn oftener and more rapidly to Ruillé than to Saint Mary's. Yes, always do I wish to be the daughter of that amiable Providence.

When we left Saint Mary's I intended to write to you as soon as we arrived, but hardly had I been here three months when I was taken ill and was in and out of bed about four months. When I arose it was to give the children the lessons our American Sister was not able to teach. Next day I was worse again, and thus I crept about for a long time. My illness has been attributed to overwork and fatigue, and I think this is true. Only three in number, we have the two classes, the care of the church linen, laundry and mending for the priest and for ourselves, also cooking for the pastor, which means that when he meets his confreres or other friends, meals must be prepared at all hours. This latter circumstance disturbs our work and leads to irregularity. More than all this, we have the care of a cow, and as we have no stable to house her, we must milk her in good or bad weather at whatever hour she presents herself. Each of the other Sisters being fully occupied with school duties and I with a few lessons only, although they take turns at the cooking by weeks, all the heavy work fell upon me, drawing water, washing and ironing in a country where one has sometimes all four seasons in one day. . . . The pastor, upon whom we are dependent and to whom for the least things we must address ourselves, neglected nothing to restore me to health.

My illness determined my superior to permit us to receive a young girl of seventeen years and an orphan of thirteen or fourteen to assist us in exchange for maintenance and tuition. We needed the younger girl especially to carry the meals to the pastor. . . . Our priest, a young Austrian who speaks ten or twelve languages, is capable for the greatest enterprises. He is perhaps the only priest in Indiana who is in a position to maintain an establishment of Sisters, not by his funds but his zeal and industry. He bought us the house in which we live and the grounds surrounding it. His congregation of about a thousand German Catholics, although very poor, pay him in provisions, which are delivered at the convent. We are obliged to return to him the tuition money received from the school, which amounts to very little and would not suffice to support the house. The number of pupils has never exceeded thirty and is below that at present. Many pay nothing at all.²⁸

²⁸ S.M.W.A.

Jasper, as now constituted, illustrated Bishop de la Hailandière's idea of the proper administration of the missions of the Sisters of Providence in Indiana. The Sisters once accepted by the motherhouse and trained in the religious life, passed from the jurisdiction of their superiors to that of the parish priest, who assumed entire responsibility for their spiritual and temporal concerns. Their intercourse with the motherhouse became intermittent, as is seen in the letters of Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, although they were still subject to the French Rule of 1835, which required a letter from every Sister to the superior four times a year. This prescription they could not fulfill without the pastor's permission. This administration of the Community in isolated small groups was not however entirely feasible, even if it had been satisfactory, as in cases of illness or incapacity of the Sisters or growth in the school, the schools in the poverty of pioneer beginnings could not function without the assistance of the motherhouse. From now on the Bishop definitely frowned upon any attempt on Mother Theodore's part to take cognizance of her Sisters' situation at Jasper. "While I was at Vincennes," wrote Mother Theodore several months after the 1842 retreat which the Jasper Sisters had missed, "I was desirous of going to see our Sisters at Jasper, but he did not wish it."²⁴

The Sisters deeply felt their isolation from the motherhouse, although there was no difficulty from the pastor whose spiritual nature gave special point to his advice and direction. He sounded a warning note to Mother Theodore, however, against expanding too rapidly:

I feel obliged to advise you not to go quick to establish many houses of yours in the Diocese, that they may not become too soon wavering or what God avert, tottering. That is a very candid advice, and I am sure spoken of by the Holy Ghost whatever may be your sentiments about it, believe me, I have no other interest than this, the greater glory of God and the great success of your Society with God, by God, and through God.²⁵

Father Kundek had however already sent two postulants to the novitiate from Jasper, and his letters often contained very encouraging words:

You have many troubles, but *post nubila Phoebus*. I see in spirit all the blessings which God has in store for your house to be poured out upon you. Yet many tribulations some not given but permitted by God therefore less meritorious though patiently endured.²⁶

He was often absent for long periods. He had already founded the church and parish of Ferdinand before the Sisters arrived in Jasper, and they required his constant attention. He made also from time to time extended missionary journeys which took him to Chicago, Sainte Marie, Evansville. In 1844 he went south for his health and remained to help build a church for the German Catholics of New Orleans till the Bishop ordered him back. The desire of a life of solitude and retirement arose vividly however at different times in his life and threatened to withdraw him from his apostolic labors. "I learn that Mr. Buteux has become a Jesuit," he wrote to Mother Theodore. "Oh, how happy I would be if a year ago I could have been in his place, but it was not the will of my sweet

²⁴ A Mère Marie, 15 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

²⁵ June 8, 1842. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ September 6, 1842. S.M.W.A.

Jesus."²⁷ Ten years later in Switzerland at the great shrine of Our Lady of Einsiedeln he was strongly tempted to enroll himself among the sons of Saint Benedict, but he did not do so and returned to die at the early age of forty-seven among his faithful people at Jasper.

For many years the school was hampered by poverty, and its career marked by various vicissitudes. Mother Theodore made great sacrifices for Jasper, however, and maintained the Sisters herself when the parish did not do so. The strong Catholic atmosphere and the Old World practices of piety established by Father Kundek were very dear to the Sisters. The Reverend Albert Kleber, O.S.B., gives several instances of the regime inaugurated by Father Kundek:

When Father Kundek rode out on a sick call and had the Blessed Sacrament with him, he took along a little hand bell. As he rode his solitary way along the widely scattered farms, he rang the bell whenever he passed a farm or people at work in the fields; and people would come out of the houses or stop work in the fields in order to kneel and adore the Blessed Sacrament whereupon Father Kundek would bless them with the Blessed Sacrament and then pass on.²⁸

The same authority relates of a later pastor that when a luckless parishioner so far forgot himself as to greet his reverence with "Guten Morgen, Herr Pfarrer" instead of the beautiful German salutation, "Gelobt sei Jesus Christus,"²⁹ customary in the parish, the imperturbable pastor answered promptly, "In Ewigkeit, Amen,"³⁰ as he passed on.³¹ A picture unique in that or any other age was that of the patriotic pastor, a sturdy and consistent Democrat, his people's choice if he had been willing, to represent them in the State Legislature in Indianapolis, in command as "Duke of Jasper" of the uniformed Knights of Father Kundek or Father Kundek's Guards, one hundred strong, on gala civic or religious occasions.³²

Mother Theodore has left a delightful picture of the rural environs of Jasper written during her visit there after her return from France in 1844:

The beauty of the forests of Indiana in the rich and lovely month of May surpasses all description. The rivers, swollen by the rains, flow through long lanes of verdure, caressing the islands they seem to carry with them in their course and which look like floating nosegays. The trees raise their straight trunks to the height of more than a hundred and twenty feet and are crowned with tops of admirable beauty. The magnolia, the dogwood, the catalpa, covered with white flowers, the perfumed snow of the springtime, intermingle with the delicate green of the other trees. Wild lianas climb up to the top of the loftiest trees and then fall down in festoons of every shape, only to begin again upon the ground a new life, thence to climb up again to other heights. How truly is this part of the globe named the *New World*.

Animals of every kind are the quiet possessors of the woods; and here also are the hummingbird and a multitude of other birds. And all stay willingly near the habitations of man. The stag and the roe were not at all frightened at our approach. There is one creature, however, whose confidence we would willingly dispense with, and that is the serpent. There are specimens of all colors and sizes. The Sisters of Jasper

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Kleber, *Saint Joseph Parish, Jasper, Indiana*, p. 40.

²⁹ Praised be Jesus Christ.

³⁰ Forever. Amen.

³¹ Kleber, *Saint Joseph Parish, Jasper, Indiana*, p. 79.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

told us that they had killed two very large ones in their school rooms. The snakes glide in under the logs, and only the Lord can protect us.

The congregation at Jasper is a very fervent one. During six months when the pastor was away from his parish, these good Germans came every Sunday seven or ten miles to sing hymns in the church. Thursday last, which was Ascension Day, I saw a whole parish that had walked ten miles in procession. They were in double file, the cross carried by a young man who walked at the head. Arrived at the church, after assisting at Mass they listened to two sermons, one in English, the other in German. The service ended only about two o'clock.

I must admit I was very tired; and I say to my shame that my fervor was put to the blush when I saw all these fervent Christians begin again their pious procession. All the people, a parish of musicians, formed ranks again and, chanting hymns and sacred songs, returned to their own villages praising God.³³

Jasper is today the largest similar parish in Indiana. It is also the oldest establishment of the Sisters of Providence and with its handsome church, convent, and excellently equipped parochial school, is one the finest missions of the Community. No doubt Mother Theodore's prayers on earth and in heaven have called down many blessings upon the mission of Jasper, which she loved to call "our eldest daughter."

Saint Francisville, Illinois

The third applicant among the Indiana clergy for Sisters was Father Simon Lalumiere in Washington.³⁴ In the previous January he had been asking the Emmitsburg superior to transfer to Washington two of the four Sisters of Charity at Vincennes.³⁵ He was removed from Washington to Terre Haute however late in 1842. Here the Bishop was disappointed in the handful of Catholics who still made up the congregation, and he felt that the fine substantial church built there so early was somewhat in the nature of a mistake. "We must be sure," he wrote of another church projected at this time, "that it will not become useless as soon as the canal is finished. Terre Haute should serve as an example."³⁶ Eventually Father Lalumiere obtained Sisters for Saint Joseph's, Terre Haute, but not till January, 1849. His coming to Terre Haute was the occasion of frequent contacts of the Community with this good, devoted, saintly priest, later one of Mother Theodore's staunchest friends and supporters in the dark days of "our troubles."³⁷ He had previously paid several visits to Saint Mary's and had offered to Mother Theodore a tract of land in the vicinity of Fort Wayne.³⁸

He was of Canadian origin, his family settled for some time at Vincennes where he was born in 1804 and baptized Simon Petit by the Jesuit missionary Father Donatien Olivier. Father Lalumiere's ancestors, the Petits of Trois Rivières, Canada, had been there in 1756 and were early

³³ *J. and L.*, pp. 176, 177.

³⁴ March 8, 1842. Community Diary.

³⁵ Lalumiere to Mother Xavier, January 7, 1842.¹ Saint Joseph's, Emmitsburg, Archives.

³⁶ A Rev. A. Martin, 26 septembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

³⁷ "nos épreuves."

³⁸ *Life and Lifework of Mother Theodore Guérin*, p. 151.

called Lalumière.³⁹ The family name was Petit, but the French Canadians were much given to changing their names, adding to the family patronymic another by which they eventually became known. Thus Antoine Petit was called or "dit Lalumiere" in Vincennes, and his son Simon followed his example with a difference, Simon Lalumiere "dit," or called, Petit. Eventually the original name Petit was discarded.

Father Lalumiere was the first native priest of Vincennes. Educated at Saint Thomas Seminary, Kentucky, he was ordained by Bishop Benedict J. Flaget, January 3, 1830,⁴⁰ and was sent to Black Oak Ridge in Daviess County, Indiana,⁴¹ later known as Saint Peter's, where he built a brick church dedicated to that saint and another later at Washington named for the Bishop, Saint Simon's, and dedicated by Bishop de la Hailandière, November 6, 1842. The Bishop appointed Father Lalumiere at once to Terre Haute and to the Catholics employed on the Canal, also to a number of outlying missions in Indiana and Illinois, York, Darwin, the North Arm, etc. He died in 1857 after fifteen years of devoted service to the Catholics of Terre Haute, loved and respected equally by Protestants and Catholics. His remains lie under the Blessed Virgin's altar of Saint Joseph's Church, formerly marked by a tablet in the church wall. His faithful dog is said to have died at his tomb.

The next of the Indiana clergy to ask Sisters from Mother Theodore was Father Louis Ducoudray, though St. Francisville, the second missionary venture of the Sisters of Providence in America, opened toward the end of the same year 1842, differed considerably from the Jasper foundation. Known earlier as Rivière au Chat, Saint Francisville was in 1842 a poor and small Canadian French settlement twelve miles south of Vincennes as the crow flies, but following the sinuous river, which sweeps out westward here, it is somewhat farther. Rivière au Chat appears in the Catholic Directory for 1837 as visited from Vincennes, and Bishop Flaget and Father Nicholas Petit, S. J., had included this little settlement in their missionary tours from Kentucky. Later Bishop Bruté could come here when the severe weather made longer journeys impossible, and he describes the poor widow's log cabin where he said Mass, "the loom on one side, the cask and pot of soap to be made on the other."⁴² On his return from France in 1836 he was able to give Cat River a resident pastor in the person of young Father John Corbe, and in January, 1837, the Bishop was present when the first tree was felled for the new church to be named for the pastor's patron, Saint John. It was finished and dedicated a year and a half later in July, 1838.

The mission was a poor and lonely one, and Bishop Bruté before his health failed, often visited the young pastor bringing him some provisions or a little money. In 1840 when Father Martin was transferred to Logansport from Vincennes, Father Corbe was removed to Vincennes to replace

³⁹ Tanguay, *Dictionnaire Généalogique des Familles Canadiennes*, vol. 6, pp. 326-333.

⁴⁰ Lalumiere to Rosati, February 16, 1830, St. Louis Diocesan Archives: Parish Records of Saint Joseph's Church, Terre Haute; *U. S. Catholic Miscellany*, February 6, 1830.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 11, 1831, quoted in Godecker, *Simon Bruté de Rémur*, p. 189.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 237.

him as president of the seminary ⁴³ by Bishop de la Hailandière, and Father Louis Ducoudray, a young priest from Rennes, a cousin of the Bishop and a member of his 1839 colony, took charge of Saint Francisville. He is remembered as ardently devoted to music, a fine singer and musician. He left Vincennes for the South in 1847 and soon afterwards succumbed to yellow fever.

On July 20, 1842, the Particular Council at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods met to discuss the application of Father Ducoudray for two Sisters for the school of his five-year-old parish. There were thirty French Catholic families in the place and nineteen Protestant families. The prospects, however, were not bright. "He hopes to have money from the township to help him support the Sisters, and he has a house." ⁴⁴ The Council decided however to make the trial and fixed October 18, 1842, as the date for the installation of the Sisters. On July 24 at a second meeting it was decided to admit Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Marie Joseph to their profession. Their three years of novitiate were not complete, but both were to be needed as local superiors, and the Bishop gave the necessary dispensation. The proceeding was somewhat irregular but indispensable if Saint Francisville was to open, as Sister Liguori was to be its local superior.

The school was to be a public school, and Father Ducoudray was hurrying his arrangements to have everything in readiness. Early in August he wrote to Mother Theodore "*au galop*," as he said, that he had succeeded in securing the income from the land set apart for maintaining a free school. The trustees were satisfied and were preparing to hold an election at which he fully expected to be chosen unanimously to establish the school. He was giving up his house to the Sisters and was moving elsewhere. "The whole country hereabouts is counting upon a school kept by your Sisters," he wrote. "Two of your good religious will accomplish much good in this district. . . . Be certain that on my side I will neglect nothing to make it pleasant for them, and with the aid of God, I hope to succeed." ⁴⁵ He needed one French and one English Sister, which was exactly what Mother Theodore was giving him. The Bishop wrote to Mother Theodore on October 9 that Mr. Ducoudray would be ready to receive the Sisters, and he approved the choice of Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine for the mission. He thought the outlook excellent for a very successful school. ⁴⁶

Mother Theodore accompanied by Sister Mary Cecilia left Saint Mary's on October 20 to install the two Sisters at Saint Francisville. Lush prairies green in early springtime with wheat, the rich black soil giving promise of the abundant harvest of summer, and in autumn an expanse of golden stubble, spread down along the banks of the Wabash, south of Vincennes. Here in the region early known as the Catherinettes, the long narrow tracts of the pioneer Canadian *habitants* edge the old trail. Their log houses were constructed of upright hewn logs in the distinctive Canadian fashion known as *poteaux en terre*, differing greatly from the Ameri-

⁴³ Alerding, *History of Vincennes Diocese*, p. 446.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Particular Council.

⁴⁵ A Mother Theodore, 10 août, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁶ 9 octobre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

can cabin horizontally constructed. The Creole manner of building with forward drooping eaves enclosing the little front porch is still to be seen in some of the old houses set at the extremity of the long strips, an ideal arrangement for companionship and social life, very different from the isolation of many American farmhouses elsewhere. Along this same ancient Indian trail then flooded, George Rogers Clark had urged his weary and hungry soldiers to Vincennes across the Wabash at Saint Francisville on those February days, the twenty-second and twenty-third in 1779, breast and neck-deep in the icy water, and exhausted from their long march.

A double range of grassy levees now binds the capricious river, but the old trail drops down past occasional soft undulations to the ferry at Saint Francisville, where Clark crossed with his handful of men. Here uncounted herds of buffalo from time immemorial had swept southeast toward the blue grass and salt springs of Kentucky. Many travelers now prefer to pass to the Illinois side at Vincennes over the graceful arched stone bridge, a memorial to Abraham Lincoln, who crossed there with his family in 1830 en route to Illinois. Markers along the road to Saint Francisville with data from Major Bowman's diary designate the different stages of Clark's advance upon Vincennes, the military exploit which won the old Northwest Territory for the United States.

What the Bishop knew, though Mother Theodore and the Sisters were no doubt in ignorance of it, was that the little mission was destined to an ephemeral existence. Plans for a new diocese in Illinois under way and carried out in 1843 would lead to their removal. Bishop de la Hailandière had come however for the installation of the Sisters, which took place without ceremony although Father Corbe, Father Shawe, and Father Ducoudray were present. The Sisters took possession of their house on October 23, but the harassed superior general was oppressed by too many anxious cares to remain long, and on the twenty-seventh she was back at Saint Mary's, having made the return journey in a day. Saint Francisville was far from being so remote and inaccessible as Jasper, and the river when in good condition offered the best means of transportation. Between sixty and seventy pupils were promised the Sisters at Saint Francisville, but the school never actually reached this enrollment.

We have an additional mission, wrote Mother Theodore to Mother Mary, at Francisville near Vincennes, where Sister Liguori is stationed with an American named Sister Augustine, a good child. They have forty pupils and expect many more in the spring. Everyone is happy to have the Sisters, and the Protestants give the *Curé* more than two hundred dollars a year to insure that the school will be free. They wished us to take boarders but we refused.⁴⁷

Boarding pupils in the small and crowded quarters which the early Sisters could command, when all the labor of school and convent, plus the care of the church devolved upon the teachers, were almost more than the Sisters could manage. At Saint Francisville as at Jasper their duties included the pastor's meals, laundry, and mending. Father Ducoudray was anxious not to overburden them, however, and wrote that he had no intention of establishing a *pensionnat*, and would receive the children only on condition that they would help in the kitchen, so as not to be an undue

⁴⁷ 15 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

charge to the already over-taxed Sisters. "We could not object," Mother Theodore wrote, "to receiving those good farmers' little daughters who live too far from the church to be able to avail themselves of the opportunity of a religious education. I do not know therefore how many they have of these children."⁴⁸ Here, too, they had to care for their cow, quite an extraordinary animal according to their pastor's account:

Our good Sisters have had for a month a very remarkable cow. I hardly think there exists anywhere another in the same class. After they make butter, the milk yields a good cream for coffee, and even after these two processes, a fresh sweet milk remains which is an excellent drink. You will grant that this is truly an incomparable cow.⁴⁹

We already have two establishments, which are doing well, Mother Theodore informed Bishop Bouvier. . . . In these missions as the priests are compelled to travel continually from one place to another to minister to the faithful, they are forced to leave the church in disorder, and Our Lord remains alone in a poor wooden tabernacle for a month at a time, as Mass is rarely celebrated more than once a month in each place. At present these two churches are maintained with propriety, and Jesus is visited not only by the Sisters, who recite their Office and make their other exercises of piety in the church, but also by the people who, drawn by the example of the Sisters, frequent the church, to adore their God, something they never thought of doing before. These good people are delighted to have the Sisters, and know not how to express their joy. Monseigneur would like to send others out this year, but . . . it seems to me that if we wish to accomplish good, we must do it gradually, form our subjects well, and send them out only when they are established in virtue and sufficiently instructed.⁵⁰

A line traced on the outside of one of the Bishop's letters to Mother Theodore received just before the Sisters' departure for Jasper reveals the perplexities which attended missionary labors in a new country. "Je n'osais pas parler des garçons."⁵¹ The Sisters of Providence, like all the French Congregations of nuns, were founded exclusively for the education of girls. In France the younger boys were taught by the Christian Brothers and other Communities of Brothers, Father Dujarié's among them, and the older boys by priests. In America, however, priests and Sisters were few, and of teaching Brothers there were even fewer. The question later became acute and had a development which probably has not yet reached its term. As a fact however, in Jasper and in all the early schools of the Sisters of Providence boys were present. Sister Saint Francis Xavier in France and in America was deeply interested in their salvation, especially in that of neglected boys, and she was very successful in winning and instructing them. The boys in America had often no one but the Sisters to prepare them for the sacraments, and Sister Saint Francis was delighted when the Sisters at Saint Francisville were able to perform this good office as she informed Mother Mary:

Our Sisters wrote us several days ago from St. Francisville that they had taken to confession seventeen boys, who were receiving the sacrament for the first time, some of them fifteen and sixteen years old. Two of their little Protestant girls have received Baptism. When I think of all this, my good Mother, I am consoled for

⁴⁸ 15 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ A Mother Theodore, 2 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁰ 6 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁵¹ I did not dare to speak of the boys.

having left you, and I am sure that you rejoice to have sent your daughters to America even if they must die of hunger, which is hardly probable, as the good God is their father.⁵²

The pastor soon noticed a great change in the children, who became very devoted to their new teachers, but Saint Francisville, tiny, quiet village on the bluffs above the Wabash, was not too solitary to have contracted the intolerance prevailing in the America of this period, and the Sisters' work in the trustee-ridden parish caused them much suffering. The little mission lasted exactly one year. Father Martin saw the Sisters toward the end of their first seven months there. "Poor Sisters," he wrote to Mother Theodore, "they stand in need of a good dose of devotedness to love their position." They did love it however and felt that the good they were able to accomplish recompensed them for their hardships. That the two young Sisters, zealous but inexperienced, may have been somewhat at fault appears from a sentence in one of Mother Theodore's letters to France: "Sister Saint Liguori does wonders, but I fear she has not been prudent enough, as all the enemies of the Faith are ranged against her establishment. I do not know what will be the outcome of this struggle."⁵³

Even amid the pressure of later duties Mother Theodore found an opportunity to see her two daughters, their meeting a little ray of consolation and encouragement. In April, 1843, she paid them a brief visit. Her loving smile alone gave them courage, and her wise and experienced counsels, mingled with understanding sympathy, put their activities on a new basis. Father Ducoudray reported the cause of the difficulties. The trustees objected to religious instruction and to prayers before class and insisted that the Sisters allow the children to use any textbooks they might happen to have. He replied that he was at liberty to do as he wished after school hours, since the house was his property. Although the active and zealous pastor had hoped that two Breton heads, his own and the superior's, would conquer their difficulties, nevertheless on the Bishop's advice early in 1843 the school became a parochial school independent of the trustees.

One ominous note occurs as early as 1842 in one of the pastor's encouraging letters to Mother Theodore regarding the Sisters, their difficulties, and their work: "Both the Sisters are well except that Sister Liguori coughs a great deal."⁵⁴ The fatal disease which brought this valuable Sister to an early grave had evidently fastened upon her. Its essentially wasting character was not known for many years, and this frail, twenty-four-year-old superior was at this time rising at four o'clock for a seventeen-hour day. Later she asked permission of Mother Theodore, weak as she already was, to fast for the necessities of the mission. Six hours were spent in the school. Outside of these hours, their prayers of Rule and their heavy household duties over, Sister Saint Liguori devoted an hour and a half each day to helping Sister Augustine to advance in her school work and to giving French lessons to two of her own pupils. On Sunday when they had a few free moments, they visited the families of the children. The Catholics were

⁵² A Mère Marie, 29 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁵³ A Mère Marie, 8 avril, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁴ 2 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

delighted to see them, and the children clustered around them. The Protestants, though respectful, were less impressed. The homes of the French Canadians though poor were overflowing with children, to the Sisters a precious hope for the continuance of their mission.

The trustees however had now opened a rival school, and the number of the Sisters' pupils had dropped to thirty. Severe winter weather made attendance irregular. Father Ducoudray was now anxious to leave Saint Francisville. The Bishop had ordered his priests to return from the Illinois missions, Chicago, Joliet, and several other places, which were now outside his diocese, and in June, 1843, he obliged them to do so under threat of suspension. The Sisters went home to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for the retreat of 1843, and a few weeks later Father Ducoudray was there to accompany them back to Saint Francisville, though it was now outside the diocese of Vincennes. Father Ducoudray was leaving, and the days of the struggling mission were numbered. Both Sisters had fallen ill. On October 26, 1843, a single entry in the diary by Sister Saint Francis Xavier during Mother Theodore's absence in France records the end: "Our Sisters leave Saint Francisville." In a later letter Bishop de la Hailandière stated that he withdrew them because "they were without a priest or means of subsistence."⁵⁵

Surely the fragrance of the virtues practiced over a hundred years ago in the little French town on the rock by the Wabash must still draw down a benediction upon the little town, though it has never had a Sisters' school since. Sister Saint Liguori was to live four years more after leaving Saint Francisville, years of hardship and open persecution, but her faith and devotion never faltered. Her letters to Mother Theodore still preserved, some twenty-five in number, all written closely in her exquisite calligraphy, tell of her daily faithful efforts to observe the slightest details of the Rule and her grief over her small failings in a life beset with hard and incessant labor. It is the aura of such saintly lives which has brought untold blessings upon Indiana. Saint Francisville later in the 1870's gave one of its daughters to Providence, Sister Mary Alberta Comer, who after a long career of usefulness mainly as a teacher of eighth grade boys, died at the motherhouse February 20, 1941.

The Village School

The educational system which the Sisters of Providence had brought from France, that of a school for children in comfortable circumstances with tuition charges, *école payante*, usually a *pensionnat* or boarding school, and attached to it a free school for the poor, *école gratuite*, had not been carried out at once at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods owing to the exiguity of the population. Only a few of the pupils at the boarding school lived in the immediate neighborhood. After the arrival of the Sisters, however, the number of Catholics in the vicinity increased, and the number of children warranted a school for the village, which opened some time during the spring of 1842. The records as to the exact date are missing. A school in the frame church built by Father Buteux had been maintained for the

⁵⁵ A Sister Basilide, [décembre] 1843. S.M.W.A.

settlers' children before the Sisters' arrival by Brother Joseph⁵⁶ who entered Father Sorin's Community at Saint Peter's, December 28, 1841.⁵⁷ Now, however, a number of children were old enough for First Communion, both boys and girls, and this fact was doubtless the principal reason for opening the school.

Mother Theodore announced the new venture to Mother Mary in the same letter in which she spoke of the projected school at Jasper.

In a month we will open a school for the little girls of our woods, and just now while I am writing to you, a Catholic mother is begging me to take the boys. I do not know what the Sisters and His Lordship will think of this proposal. I count on putting Sister Liguori at the head of this little school. She is getting to speak English quite well now.⁵⁸

No further mention of this little school occurs in Mother Theodore's diary nor in her correspondence for over a year, but no doubt it was opened as she planned. Sister Saint Liguori's tenure was probably very brief, as she opened the mission of Saint Francisville the same year. Sister Saint Francis Xavier, however, continued to be identified with the village school from the beginning. She followed its development with the deepest interest and loved to help in instructing the children:

We have a class of boys; they remain in the little huts, a sketch of which I sent you. I cannot tell you what pleasure I find in giving them rewards. They remind me of my dear children in France, of whom I think so often, and to whom I send my love; their parents also have a share. We have a class of poor little girls, one of whom came yesterday. Although born of Catholic parents, she had never heard of God. I assure you the vocation which Father Besnoin spoke about can be well fulfilled here. We have big boys fifteen years of age, who have not yet made their First Communion. But amid all this ice, my heart is not chilled; and although many things are not what my imagination had pictured, I am very happy, and I tenderly love my dear mission.⁵⁹

She wrote again to her family:

Shall I speak to you of our dear little boys, as poor and ignorant as my boldest ambition could desire? I had the happiness of teaching one that he had a soul and that there is a God. His father is a German Catholic, his mother a Protestant. My old Jean Louis never approached him for ignorance. The other day I was astonished that he knew three answers of his catechism. I asked him if his father or one of our Sisters had taught them to him. "No," he said. I saw my little Simeon⁶⁰ blush (he is the youngest of my pupils). Then I asked him if it were Simeon. "Yes," he replied. The poor little fellow! he is not yet six years old and he is already a catechist. During recreation he taught his comrade. Today, as a reward, I gave him a pair of little yellow beads. If you knew how gentle and pious he is! The first time I explained the chapter on creation in the Bible to them I asked the difference between man and other animals, but not one was able to answer; though finally the wisest, after having attentively looked at the engraving in the Bible, blurted out: "Sister, the difference is that a horse has four feet and a man only two!"⁶¹

⁵⁶ Sister Maurice's Sketch Book. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁷ Brother Joseph was one of the group of Brothers who remained at Saint Peter's during the winter of 1841 and left for Notre Dame in February, 1842. (Data furnished by Brother Bernard, C.S.C.).

⁵⁸ A Mère Marie, 26 février, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁹ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 227.

⁶⁰ Jarboe.

⁶¹ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 218.

In February, 1843, she wrote of another experience:

I love my dear mission more and more. The other day I had the pleasure of taking our little boys to confession. I have been giving them catechism and Bible history lessons for some time. Their examination of conscience was not the most difficult for them; they were more puzzled to know how to kneel down and join their hands in the confessional. Before going to the chapel the eldest, having found an old comb and some water, made all his companions' toilet. They had never before been so well washed.

I assure you, when I saw them kneeling so devoutly—although some turned their backs towards God, and others to the Blessed Virgin—I was very much touched. One of the smallest asked which was more necessary, to remember his examination of conscience or the manner of making his genuflection towards the Blessed Sacrament, "for," said he, "I cannot think of what I have to say and at the same time remember how I should make my bow. . . ." ⁶²

The diary records that on May 1, 1843, the little boys of the neighborhood were installed in a room in the basement of the Academy building with Sister Agnes as teacher. Sister Mary Philomene replaced her for a time and found the group of boys and girls of different ages and advancement, a problem to her inexperience. Some were larger and taller than she. The school was however a great source of consolation, but the happiness of the Sisters in the woods, so poor and desolate during Mother Theodore's long absence in France, really overflowed when on Christmas day of 1843 they offered to the Infant King, more poor and desolate even than they, their First Communion class of fifteen children. Sister Saint Francis Xavier described the occasion with her usual loving gratitude to God. The preparatory retreat opened on December 21, and the ceremony took place in the Bishop's new church as yet unfinished.

I spoke to Henriette ⁶³ of the First Communion of our children of St. Mary's of the Woods. It took place on Christmas morning; nine boys and six girls had the happiness of receiving our divine Saviour Jesus. Although the floor was not yet finished and there were no doors nor windows, the feast was, for all that, very beautiful in my eyes. We decorated our altar with all the precious gifts with which your charity had enriched us the preceding year.

Instead of tapers our children had candles. We placed on the heads of our little girls the veils which we use in taking the habit. We are a thousand times happier to clothe them for Jesus than mothers are to adorn their daughters for a human union so often followed by tears. Oh! with what a good heart we have offered to God for our friends in France these first fruits of our holy mission. Poor children, how happy they were! When they had communicated, abundant tears flowed from their eyes. For the first time they tasted the unknown joys of heaven; but they have often since had the same happiness. Some of the boys were sixteen, eighteen, and nineteen years old. They owe their consolations to you. If you had spent only that one Christmas night with us you would be amply repaid for all your sacrifices.

Our boys made a retreat of four days with much fervor, and during that time they did not leave the Community premises. The day after Christmas they were very sad when they had to return to their homes. They asked me if they could not communicate again the following Monday, which was New Year's day. I told them it was too soon and to wait until the Epiphany. But love cannot suffer delay. Five of them went as ambassadors to the missionary, and after having got him to promise to

⁶² *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 219.

⁶³ Her cousin, Mlle. Henriette de la Valette at Tours.

grant their request, if possible, they begged him, as a New Year's gift, to hear their confessions, so that they might communicate the next day. Oh, how the Heart of Jesus must have rejoiced. It silently said to the heart of the priest, "Suffer the little ones to come unto Me," for they all had permission to receive Holy Communion.⁶⁴

Before the end of the year Sister Saint Francis Xavier presided at the distribution of prizes for the school. The large boys who had made their First Communion would not now return to school, and this was her last opportunity to warn and instruct them, also to reward them for their faithful attendance and responsive attention. What the *prix* could have been at a time when the poverty of the Community was so dire, one cannot but wonder, but Sister Saint Francis's gracious and elegant manners made her tiny gifts appear treasures to the grateful children. Later when grown to manhood, the boys realized that her sympathetic charity and zeal and that of the other Sisters had gradually transformed the neighborhood. She describes with her usual sprightly touch her gifts on a similar occasion somewhat later:

I have just come from distributing premiums to our children of the log house. I, being the superintendent of our free school, had invited Mother Theodore to make a speech. The assembly was large. Unfortunately for me, after looking at the premiums my superior said to me terrible things in French, such as: "If you invite me again to give such horrors I will burn the premiums, and the table too." But her indignation did not prevent the ceremony from being quite fine. Both parents and children were delighted with the rewards. Yet, to appease Mother Theodore for next year, I shall ask you to send some little flutes and spinning-tops.

On a similar occasion my good Bishop Bazin acted much better than Mother Theodore. When he came for the first time to see us at Vincennes, I was just about to give, as a reward for catechism, a hazel nut fashioned into a basket with a ribbon for a handle. I offered it to the bishop to present, and he did so with all the dignity of a bishop, though you may be sure our Sisters made me pay for my nut.

About a month ago we had First Communion. . . . Every year I have children to present to our Lord. Our little girls are very fervent, and, to show their love for God, they practice all kinds of mortification. The other day, in the ardor of their zeal, after having lighted a candle before the statue of the Blessed Virgin, the idea came to their minds to burn their fingers in her honor. They were in the act of doing so when, fortunately, a Sister entered. . . . But the most consoling thing is that they are correcting their faults.⁶⁵

The school, called Nazareth, was somewhat peripatetic in character and moved about from one location to another to be housed in various parts of the premises. The teachers too were sometimes changed perforce. In 1846 Sister Saint Francis wrote to Mother Theodore, who was absent in Vincennes: "Poor dear Mother, I am very happy. We have twenty-eight children at our log house. When I have some tedious hours, I think of those children and I am consoled. . . . Sister Joachim, Sister Michel, and I replace one another. I am satisfied with little Michel."⁶⁶

In the 1850's the boys' school was located near the cemetery, and the girls' school at one time on the north campus not far from the old grotto. "Old Providence," as it was called, the original Thralls house, was also

⁶⁴ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 237.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

⁶⁶ Dimanche, 1846. S.M.W.A.

used as a day school after the Sisters removed in 1853 to the new mother-house. In the 1870's the school was transferred to a little frame structure near the site of Guérin Hall, and Sister Mary Cajetan taught there as a young Sister. Eventually in Bishop Chatard's time, it was removed to the more immediate precincts of the village near the present site of the post office to a frame building of unique but serviceable structure known as Saint John's Village School. At this time the sentiment against teaching even small girls and boys together was at its height. The school had separate rooms with the teacher's desk in an angle, which made it possible for her to supervise both sections. The boys and girls could hear but not see one another and recited separately. In this school the beloved teachers, Sister Mary Thomas Gordon and later Sister Ann Joseph Morris, taught for many years. Stella Michael McLaughlin⁶⁷ tells of the years when Sister Ann Joseph taught them and kind Father Augustine Riehle, the pastor, was a frequent visitor. An organ was part of the school equipment, and Sister Mary Theodosia came now and then from the convent to teach hymns to the pupils. She greatly enjoyed the gusto with which they sang "All Hail to Saint Patrick." The last change of site was in 1923 during the pastorate of the Reverend Edward Hilger, who erected at a cost of \$23,000 a convenient and roomy brick school building on a plot of ground near the rectory. The course of study at present offers excellent instruction in the elementary and grammar grades to the boys and girls of the parish, whom present day practice allows to be taught in the same classes.

⁶⁷ Niece of Sister Mary Edward, Sister Eleanore, and Sister Mary Constantia Michael.

CHAPTER X

FINANCIAL AND TEMPORAL FOUNDATION

THE DISASTER OF 1842

"Crosses are the precious gifts Our
Lord makes to elite souls whom He
has chosen."

MOTHER THEODORE

THE year 1842, the year of the first tentative expansion of the Community's educational activities beyond the original foundation of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, was also a period of severe economic hardship. This year in fact their fortunes touched nadir. Poverty, intolerance, and disaster combined to bring the Community to the verge of annihilation.

For the present, however, the Sisters went about their duties quietly. Sister Saint Francis Xavier found her first winter in America much milder than she had expected, but several times during January and February Mother's Theodore's only notation in the diary is a reference to the terrible cold.

This has been rather a mild winter, she wrote in February, however the last few weeks it has frozen hard enough to cause our poor chickens to lose their feathers. Their combs and feet were frozen, as they have only the apple trees for roosting. Our watch also stopped from the cold every night. But this cold is nothing compared to what we usually have. An old man told me the other day that they have not had so mild a winter in twenty years.¹

About this same period, the month of February, the Wabash was reported as "brimful and overflowing its banks, and first-rate steamboat navigation" on for the season.² The winter and spring months were in general the advantageous periods for the temperamental Wabash, during which commerce and transportation thrived.

Any day now glancing into the little convent one might have seen Mother Theodore at her desk in "our room" busily writing, her quill pen flying over the paper, the pale blue foolscap which they must have brought from France as all their early letters are written on it; or the neat pages of her carefully kept ledger; or the precious diary in her clear Spencerian script with its strange intermingling of German a's and t's, still treasured in the Community. In the corner sits Sister Saint Liguori, copying in her exquisite chirography some important letter or a list of the Bishop's permissions, and their best seamstress, Sister Mary Xavier, sits quietly in another corner mending. Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, her habit retroussé like the French peasants in Millet's *Angelus*, moves quietly in and out engaged upon her cherished duties as sacristan, and from the kitchen may be heard the subdued rattle of pans as Sister Agnes goes about her duties as cook for the Community. A knock at the door introduces Brassier, who steps inside, cap in hand, to report the ruin of his newly sprouted crop of peas and

¹ A Mère Saint Charles, 26 février, 1842. S.M.W.A.

² *Wabash Courier*, February 12, 1842.

of the flowers pushing above ground on the border of the vegetable garden. After inquiring for the sick horse, about which Sister Olympiade is so anxious, Mother Theodore directs him to sow the peas again and to plant cabbages. Distracted at the loss of his careful work from the sudden changes of weather unknown in equable France, Brassier departs to repeat his sowing, hoping this time for a harvest. Insects, cold, sickness among the animals, and unforeseen changes of temperature render farming on the rim of the Indiana forest very much of a hardship.

Next door may be heard rising and falling earnestly, Sister Saint Francis Xavier's soft voice in broken English in her daily lesson in Sacred History to some of the postulants. Several others were employed at the Academy. The group of eager listeners have gathered around her, Sister Augustine, Sister Catherine, Sister Gabriella, Sister Philomene, Sister Mary Cecilia. Their saintly teacher no doubt had just returned from her drawing lesson at the Academy and put aside the warm shawl and sabots necessary in the sharp Indiana spring with its attendant ooze. A few months later perhaps an angry creditor would present himself, breaking into the quiet of the incipient convent, one of the three or four to whom the Community owed money in Terre Haute, pouring forth in a sharp flood of English his regret at ever having entered into business relations with foreign nuns. To this Mother Theodore, who understands probably only the drift of his remarks, must submit as best she can when she has no money.

By March the spring sowing began, and on the fifteenth Mother Theodore left Saint Mary's to conduct the first little group of missionaries, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, Sister Marie Joseph, and Sister Gabriella to the Reverend Joseph Kundek's flourishing German parish at Jasper in southern Indiana. On March 28 when she had returned from Jasper, she was accompanied by two Sisters of Charity from Saint Mary's Female School in Vincennes for a week's visit. Mother Theodore was ill when she reached home, and as she grew rapidly worse, Dr. Azel Holmes from Terre Haute was sent for. He at first pronounced her illness scarlet fever, but after a violent crisis and two weeks of acute suffering, she began to grow better. On the twentieth day she was able with devoted Sister Olympiade's help to repair to the chapel for Holy Communion at four in the morning. How serious this second attack was is revealed in a letter from Sister Saint Francis Xavier to the mistress of novices at Ruillé-sur-Loir, Sister Eudoxie:

We have just been through a terrible trial. On Easter Monday our Mother returned from Jasper. During the following night and on Tuesday she was indisposed, but we were not uneasy. On Wednesday morning she was seized with a sort of fainting fit which compelled her to leave the chapel at the Communion of the Mass. From that moment till the end of April she has been very ill. One morning she called me and said to me, "Sister Saint Francis, I am going to die today or tomorrow. I feel that I cannot possibly survive this crisis. Prepare yourself to make this sacrifice." Then she gave me some directions to be carried out after her death.

O my dear Sister Eudoxie, you who know me, you can imagine what I went through. But no, for to understand, it is not enough to know me, one would also have to realize the state of our poor little community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Not a single person capable of being superior,—I say it frankly,—debts, a farm to

supervise, a foreign language, no chaplain appointed yet, in fine everything to render the success of an undertaking difficult and the presence of a superior necessary. I saw it all in an instant, but I did not weep. I asked only permission to receive Holy Communion at the Mass which was to begin in a few moments, as I did not feel within myself the strength to make such a sacrifice. O my good Jesus, when I possessed You in my heart, courage came to me, and I felt that with You I could bear all the frightful bitterness of the future.

God was content with our resignation. We made a novena to the Sacred Heart of Mary and without doctors, without remedies, for we had not yet received any from France, without the Bishop who was away on his travels, without any human aid, by the power only of our good Mother, the Blessed Virgin, the one we needed so sorely has been given back to us. It was during those long days that I felt so profoundly our isolation, our destitution. We had not even a bath to bathe our poor patient. Last year she had the French doctor near her, Monseigneur, and Mr. Buteux. But this year! We had Jesus, however. We had His cross, and we cast ourselves into His arms.

I thanked God for bringing me here to undergo this trial, for seeing so much suffering and abandonment centering in Sister Theodore, I felt that I ought to be more truly than ever her daughter, her consolation. I have tried to assuage her situation, not by my care, for I felt so incompetent that I did not dare to present myself even a single night to watch beside her, but by my conduct. . . . During her illness and her convalescence, which is not yet over, I have spent with her every moment which the rule and my other occupations left free.³

Though Mother Theodore had been at death's door during her month-long illness, as Sister Saint Francis Xavier records, she was never so neglected. A note in the diary tells us that when the Bishop was informed of her critical condition, he wrote that he could not come. Towards the end of April before she was able yet to be about after her illness, Fathers Corbe and Ducoudray arrived at St. Mary's, "almost dead from the upsetting of their carriage at Terre Haute," as the diary says. Four days later the Bishop, alarmed at the news of their accident, hurried from Vincennes accompanied by Dr. Baty to care for them. They had already recovered, however, and left with the doctor, the Bishop following them two days later, after only four days at St. Mary's. Mother Theodore in her correspondence hardly refers to her illness. With her characteristic gaiety, which did so much to soften for her Sisters their poverty and hardships, the past was committed to the mercy of God. Most of her letters like this one contain some gleams of mirth. In the same mail as Sister Saint Francis Xavier's letter she writes also to Sister Eudoxie:

Today, dear Sister Eudoxie, everyone is thinking of you; at least three of your daughters are writing to you. Permit me also to say a little word. I thought I should never write to you again, for on returning from Jasper, I fell very ill. Fortunately our dear Lord does not want me yet as I am too imperfect. . . . Everything goes on, as usual here, but our poverty increases with that of our neighbors. Such misery has never been seen in our woods. It is very sad. Beg for us, dear Sister, the riches of heaven. They are worth more than those of earth.

Ask for us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Our postulants have less need of them. All with one exception have answered me that in Confirmation they have received the body and blood, soul and divinity of the Holy Ghost. You see they are more advanced than you. Every time I write, it seems I must tell you something droll.

³ 5 mai, 1842. S.M.W.A.

Mother Theodore was now able to be up and about, and on May 3 the *Veni Creator* and the *Ave Maris Stella* were solemnly chanted to begin the novitiate of five postulants, most of whom had been candidates for many months. Some among them were to give many years of service to the Community. One, Sister Mary Cecilia Bailly, was a future superior general, the others were Sister Mary Celestia Kennedy, Sister Catherine Eisen, Sister Ann Joseph Coomes, and Sister Ann Walter. May devotions hardly known as yet in America, were carried on again this year with devoted solemnity, and the Bishop gave permission for an extra Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament weekly and at the close of the month.

Mother Theodore made a trip to Terre Haute about this time to pay some bills. The river was higher than for ten years, in "fine steamboatable order" as the *Wabash Courier* put it. The little river town was entertaining ex-President Martin Van Buren, who was touring the Western country. During the summer and fall Henry Clay's campaign for the Presidency occupied the attention of Vigo County voters. The Wabash and Erie Canal was edging down from Lafayette nearer and nearer Terre Haute. By September sixteen hundred men were working on it, and applicants were flocking toward it from every direction. The goal for the fall of 1843 was Coal Creek, north of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. When Mother Theodore, accompanied by Sister Saint Francis Xavier or Sister Basilide, appeared in the general store of Samuel Crawford or elsewhere in Terre Haute to make purchases or settle accounts, they were gazed at in amazement owing to the general custom which still confined the activities of women to domestic concerns.

A woman in this country is never seen transacting the least business, religious no more than others. Eyes are opened wide at Terre Haute and everywhere when I appear to pay bills or to make purchases. Everyone is astonished.⁴

Terre Haute was still in 1842 a frontier town. The unpaved streets were seas of deep mud in spring and inches deep with dust in summer. Certain lower sections of the streets showed great mudholes, and rapidly driven vehicles spattered the dresses of ladies on the narrow sidewalks. Charles Dickens wrote in 1842 of the pigs upon the streets of New York. A city ordinance in Terre Haute of a few years earlier forbade driving or leading animals upon the sidewalks. During the winter, which was the pork packing season, King Porker reigned supreme on the Wabash, and the streets were sometimes filled with great herds of pigs, the peculiar high coo-ee of the hog caller rising above the din. Town life centered in the main about the old courthouse at Third and Main Streets with its long racks for tethering animals and its fringe of locust trees flowering and fragrant in early summer. During the steamboat and flatboat season accidents were not infrequent along the river. In the uncertain navigation, owing to the varying depth of the Wabash above Terre Haute, steamboats sometimes ran aground and had to be towed off at great expense or left to total ruin. The *Courier* reported the steamboat *Lilly* from Lafayette about this time, snagged twelve miles above Terre Haute and under water to the cabin, her cargo of two hundred barrels of flour probably a total loss. The stages too turned over frequently in the frightful roads of

⁴ A Mère Saint Charles, 24 août, 1842. S.M.W.A.

the time and sometimes were hurled over a precipice or down a steep hillside.

The local newspaper, the *Wabash Courier*, often came under the Sisters' eyes as it had carried the advertisement of the Academy and reported the commencements, and the editor Thomas Dowling's daughter Kate had been one of the earliest pupils. Like all the Western papers, it was very different from a present day newspaper, and at this time carried on the front page poetry by Professor Henry W. Longfellow, Amelia Welby, and others, columns of Washington news next to brief announcements of the death of Francis Scott Key in Baltimore, of Carlyle the "infidel writer" in England, and of Noah Webster in New Haven, Connecticut. Names prominent in later Saint Mary's history were in the news. Edward W. McGaughey⁵ was running on the Whig ticket for Congress, and Hugh Stewart,⁶ former owner of the Indiana Blast Furnace, had just been awarded the work on the Canal from Coal Creek to Terre Haute. The political campaigns of this period in America were marred by personalities and excesses. On the inside page of the *Courier* during the summer of 1842, the advertisement of Mrs. Susan Williams's Female School could be seen, a fact which still affected adversely the little *pensionnat* at Saint Mary's.

From now on the duties, the correspondence, and the business which fell to Mother Theodore multiplied from day to day. She possessed unusual capacity for business, and despite the new and strange language, and the unfamiliar measures and money system, she rarely made an error. Mother Cecilia gives an account of the exterior development which gradually took place:

Improvements were commenced, that is, land was cleared, fenced, and put under cultivation. Roads were made and buildings erected. All this was under her immediate direction. She wrote much, her correspondence being extensive and the business writing of the community, though in its beginning, was of itself considerable. She was out a good deal directing the labor, and she had to receive all those who came on business of any kind, for she made all the purchases that supplied the daily wants. Yet with this multiplicity of duties she seldom missed giving her every day instruction at the regular hour. She frequently came from bargaining with men and right away turned her mind to a religious subject and gave an admirable instruction as if she had prepared it. Saint Mary's began to assume a different aspect; many Catholic families came to live in the neighborhood, and it soon began to progress from a wilderness into a cultivated and settled country.⁷

Mother Theodore's English correspondence from this time became increasingly heavy. Her instructions were in English, although Mother Anastasie, who entered the novitiate in January, 1844, avers that at that time the Community was still bi-lingual and the Sisters never knew which language Mother Theodore would use when she began her conference.

Work was going forward daily on the Community farm, and the Bishop was planning further improvements. During Mother Theodore's illness just in the heart of the late spring when every day was important for the planting of grain and vegetables which would be their food for the coming winter, two of their horses died, and the third and last was so seriously sick

⁵ Father of Sallie McGaughey Rand, second graduate of the Academy.

⁶ Grace Wheeler Mug's uncle.

⁷ Mother Cecilia's MS., p. 48.

that they expected to lose it from day to day. The poor animal too was subjected to the barbarous medical practice still prevalent in 1842. It was bled several times, but despite the inadequate remedies of the frontier, it was out of danger by the end of April. To her skill in medicine and nursing, Mother Theodore though still ill herself, had to add the proper care of suffering animals. The oxen too had fallen sick, but finally during the first week in May, corn was sown. The peas and flowers planted earlier had all been frozen by one of the sudden changes of temperature so characteristic of the volatile American spring. Now Brassier sowed the peas again and planted cabbage, but by the middle of the month the corn had been destroyed by insects and had to be replanted. Just at a very busy time the first week in June, Brassier decided to leave, and one of the horses needed so much at that time for the work of the farm strayed away and was not recovered for many months.

In April three carpenters had arrived from Vincennes, and toward the end of June, Jean Marie Marcile came to take charge of the work upon the new village church which the Bishop was building. It was to replace the first little wooden edifice, which had caught fire from an overheated stove in February, 1840, and with no facilities for fighting the blaze was soon a heap of ashes. The log cabin, the Sisters' chapel in the Thralls house after they acquired it, and finally the parlor of the new brick priests' house, had been successively used for divine service. The need was acute, therefore, for a church large enough to accommodate the growing Community, the school, now consisting in all of some forty persons, and the farmers and their families every three weeks when Sunday Mass was said.

Bishop de la Hailandière's finances had improved, no doubt as a result of another generous grant from France. These sums, when he received them, he spent at once with admirable self-sacrifice and zeal in erecting buildings and acquiring church sites in various places, and then relapsed into destitution and melancholy till the next windfall. His elaborate developments in the village of Vincennes were found fault with in America and later in Europe especially when Father Buteux returned there. The two hundred dollars he had secured from M. Mertian at Strasbourg would help pay for the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods church. The Indiana priests felt aggrieved that so much was spent at Vincennes when they were struggling to build up their poor parishes.

At Saint Mary's, too, where extensive improvements were being made upon the little wooden convent, Mother Theodore was distressed at the resultant spectre of debt and destitution which haunted her. During 1842 the total amount received from the boarding school did not reach \$330, and the Bishop contributed nearly seven hundred to maintain the Community. When he audited Mother Theodore's accounts in December, 1842, he found a surplus of \$32.31 "not counting the considerable expense made by the Bishop for the house, Cel. Ev. de Vinc." This outlay was no doubt for the completion of the two wings to the little convent left without floors, doors, or windows during the winter of 1841-1842 and completed after the warm weather arrived. When the three carpenters reached Saint Mary's in April they were employed at this work.

All three of the young men were skilful artisans, and were of great

assistance to the Bishop in carrying out his rather elaborate building program. Marcile and Eluère had been in America for some time, but young Jacques Roquet had arrived in Vincennes only in 1842. He was engaged so constantly upon the church at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as to have been later considered its builder. Both he and Marcile had lived at Saint Servan and were known to some of the Sisters. Prosper Eluère,⁸ a skilled iron-worker from Rennes, was also employed upon the church. He had known the Bishop in France, and he belonged to a family distinguished for the eminent sanctity of one of its members. The saintly Carmelite nun of Tours, Sister Saint Pierre, to whom Our Lord revealed the devotion to the Holy Face, was his younger sister. They boarded with Joseph Thralls, and after Marcile's arrival in June, the work on the foundations of the church went forward steadily. In May the Bishop had written an admonition to Mother Theodore regarding the work then in progress, "I am sorry you have not yet got the cellar dug. That stops everything, and the work will be indefinitely prolonged. Now, my daughter, set your men to work."

On account of the difficulty in getting brick, the church was two years in building. The cornerstone was laid without ceremony on August 22, 1842, but the approach of cold weather halted the work and the finished building was dedicated only on November 10, 1844. Bishop de la Hailandière was a consummate builder. He was aware of this and in moments of dejection was wont to refer to himself as a mason. "Poor Bishop, for what am I good? Perhaps to build houses, a true mason. . . . Pray and secure prayers that I may not be an obstacle to good," he wrote to Father Martin.⁹ A certain air of good taste and even elegance characterized every edifice he erected. His buildings were perhaps not of the first excellence, but there were not many good houses in Indiana in 1840, and in general his contribution to Indiana architecture was a notable achievement.

At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods he elected in 1842 to rear a small brick church in imitation of the Roman Pantheon. Square below, the upper part and the roof were circular. The solid walls unrelieved by windows with only the row of small lunettes near the roof for lighting gave the little brick edifice a prisonlike air which detracted from its appearance. The site was in front of the Academy to the southwest near the cluster of white crosses where the Catholics of the locality had been buried since 1837, on the present site of the College Conservatory of Music. Of all Bishop de la Hailandière's structures this little church was probably the least successful. Though snug and airtight for the severe weather of January and February, the effect in the torrid summer Sundays with the thermometer hovering between ninety and one hundred and swarms of mosquitoes in the air must have been punitive not only to the farmers and their families but also to the Sisters in their heavy French habits. The people used the south front door. The Sisters usually entered the church by the northeast sacristy door and occupied the front places on the Epistle side. Mother Theodore's place was next the middle aisle, and Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, until she left for Jasper, had knelt next to her. The postulants' places were immediately behind the Sisters.

⁸ Grandfather of Mary Louise Eluère, '30.

⁹ 8 janvier, 1843. S.M.W.A.

During all the early years the French Sisters, all well trained in plain chant, supplied the music. Jacques Roquet had a fine baritone voice, and he often sang solos especially at the Sunday and Thursday Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Sister Saint Francis Xavier tells of the nostalgia the Sisters felt upon hearing him and the privations they offered so willingly to God in the depths of their forest:

I acknowledge that the absence of exterior worship is perhaps one of the greatest sacrifices God has imposed upon me. To give you an example of my virtue on this point, I shall tell you that the other evening during Benediction I heard some one singing *O Salutaris Hostia*. I did not recognize the voice, but I knew it to be French; it was that of a young workman who arrived here recently. I was all in tears not from devotion but from emotion. You see how miserable I am yet.¹⁰

Although Thomas Brassier had left some months before, one of his sons still remained, and this year for the first time appears in Mother Theodore's account book the name of one who was a tried and faithful employee for many years, Logan Hagan, whose sons succeeded him in the service of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Monseigneur sent his carpenter Richardville from Vincennes to build the fences necessary in that era of roving domestic animals. All the early pictures, Sister Saint Francis Xavier's, Mother Anastasie's, and Sister Maurice's drawings and water colors, show white picket fences enclosing separately the priest's house, the church, and the convent. These were no doubt the work of Richardville. Leander Thralls also was occupied almost the entire summer and autumn. Some of the workmen at least had to be boarded by the Community, and during the retreat Monseigneur sent his cook, and Marcile brought his wife from Vincennes.

This good Bishop, wrote Mother Theodore, interests himself greatly in our mission. He wishes to put us on a solid footing and has made us build additional rooms to our little house. . . . We have a kitchen, a refectory, a dormitory, also a bakery. I have a little room too. All this is very nice, but it is not paid for, and I would a hundred times rather have only our little cabin than to have debts. We are practicing the greatest economy, and yet we are reproached for spending too much.¹¹

An experienced farmer to take charge of the farm was however an urgent necessity. The versatility of the American pioneers was a source of amazement to the French Sisters. The Hoosier farmer and his family were forced to provide for their personal needs or suffer privation, and necessity made them skillful.

For ordinary services required, each family finds help enough in its own members. They are of all trades: masons, architects, joiners, carpenters, bakers, butchers, etc., and what will seem more singular to you, these same persons will be ministers and preachers.¹²

Bishop de la Hailandière was now offering Mother Theodore as overseer an Alsatian farmer from the Picquet colony at Sainte Marie, Michel Guthneck, whose daughter Catherine, Sister Therese, had entered the

¹⁰ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 224.

¹¹ A Mère Marie, 12 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

¹² A Mère Marie, 26 février, 1842. S.M.W.A.

novitiate and was the cook at the *pensionnat* during the first weeks in July, 1841, and later. A second daughter, Margaret, Sister Martha, entered in September, 1842, and later a third in 1844, named for her good old father, Sister Michel. He was undecided at first about undertaking the post. "Sister Therese's father has been here for five or six days," wrote the Bishop. "He wished to go and see before settling down. . . . I may be mistaken, but he seems a little too much of a gentleman to be suitable. You will see."¹³ Père Michel, as he was affectionately called by the Sisters, came to act as superintendent of the farm on September 22, 1842, a post he filled till his death in January, 1856, one week before Sister Saint Francis Xavier's. He was skillful, faithful, and devoted and relieved Mother Theodore of much concern for the management of the crops, the supplies, and domestic animals. His daughter Margaret entered the novitiate the next day.

The relations of the Community with Bishop de la Hailandière, subject of so many prayers and tears, continued outwardly on an agreeable footing. His attitude of silence and unconcern when Mother Theodore had been at death's door in April, showed however a very distinct change from his extreme anxiety and concern during her illness of the previous year. The Community was obliged therefore to have recourse to the local doctors, although she had all but succumbed before from the effects of one of their prescriptions, probably calomel from the use of which many died at this time of slow mercury poisoning. A very painful source of displeasure on the Bishop's part was his wish to force certain persons upon the Community. Sister Aloysia was one of these. When he presided at the meeting of the Particular Council at which her vocation was discussed, the Bishop openly insisted that she must be asked to withdraw. Yet as Mother Theodore mentions to Bishop Bouvier, Bishop de la Hailandière was displeased at her dismissal.

Now a second instance of the same character arose, an attempt to compel the Community to receive a person whom Ruillé had refused and whom Bishop Bouvier and the Sisters who had taught her in France agreed in finding totally lacking in a religious vocation. She had been dismissed from several Communities in Europe. Bishop de la Hailandière had had in view in France from the first several young girls as prospective workers in his diocese. A number of these, as we have seen, were fitted for domestic tasks and spent years in devoted service to the Bishops and the seminarians in Vincennes. Others were capable of teaching, however, and the only way to utilize them, alone and without any knowledge of English, was for them to join a religious order. The Bishop had realized this, and for this reason had advised Mlle. Le Fer de la Motte to try her vocation with the Sisters of Providence at Ruillé-sur-Loir with the understanding that she would come to America with the missionary colony. Irma had learned at Soulaines that two of the young girls whom Bishop de la Hailandière intended to take with him to Vincennes had been refused at Ruillé.¹⁴

Writing to Bishop Bouvier in April, 1840, Bishop de la Hailandière mentions Mlle. Marie Bernard, "a person for whom I entertain a great

¹³ A Mother Theodore, 3 juillet, 1842. S.M.W.A.

¹⁴ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 90.

esteem." She was waiting at Chartres in 1840 for the Sisters to leave.¹⁵ He did not evidently encourage her to come to America however till about two years later, although Mother Theodore had already been warned by Mother Mary not to accept her. What Mother Mary's sternness could be Mother Theodore knew only too well, but her predicament was even greater when she learned from the Bishop that Mlle. Bernard was in America, had even come as far as Vincennes, and his Lordship wished to know whether she could be received into the novitiate. Mother Theodore had hardly time to prepare a most submissive answer to the Bishop's letter when she was told that he and Mlle. Bernard had arrived and were at the door.

Nothing could be done then but receive her, especially as Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Basilide begged that Ruillé might be written to regarding her. She had crossed the ocean evidently with Father Benoit, who was returning to America from a voyage to France, and she had been encouraged to come by the Bishop, "without promising however to receive her."¹⁶ As to writing to Ruillé, the Bishop expressed himself unequivocally:

I add only two words in regard to what you now say, "We are going to write to Ruillé." Whatever the answer may be and in whatsoever manner you may write concern me not at all. The prohibition or permission which may come from there does not affect me. I have told you *viva voce* in full what I think about this, and I protest against any dependency of this kind to which you want to subject this rising house of St. Mary's.¹⁷

The Bishop describes Mlle. Bernard: "age, thirty-one, condition good, fortune *belle*." After lengthy and careful consideration she was found entirely without any aptitude for the religious life, yet she remained seven months. "Even in sending her away we could not avoid displeasing our good Bishop."¹⁸

Similar cases are not wanting in the lives of the saints. Saint Margaret Mary was subjected to a bitter persecution continuing for months for having refused to countenance the admission to the religious life of a certain Mlle. Vichy-Chamron. Even Cardinal de Bouillon, lord of Paray, interested himself in the case and combined with others to condemn the saintly mistress of novices. Mother Theodore's judgment concerning Mlle. Bernard proved eventually to have been correct. She was discovered to be of unsound mind and died in a sanitarium not without having caused considerable embarrassment to the Bishop.

About this time in May, 1842, the hardships and penury of the poor little Community in the forest were complicated by the news of strange rumors to their disadvantage which were current in France. One of the closest friends of the Ruillé Community was the zealous curé of Fougères, Father Hardy. When two of his parishioners, the two novices, Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Mary Xavier, volunteered for the Vincennes mission, his kindly interest followed them to Indiana. Several of the Vincennes priests knew him well, and he had recruited some of the young French girls

¹⁵ Mgr. de la Hailandière à Soeur Theodore à Soulaines, 1840. S.M.W.A.

¹⁶ 10 juin, 1842. S.M.W.A.

¹⁷ A Mother Theodore, 3 juillet, 1842. S.M.W.A.

¹⁸ Mother Theodore à Mgr. Bouvier, 23 février, 1843. S.M.W.A.

who came to assist in the domestic work at the seminary. Just at this time he had under his direction a young girl who manifested both the desire and the capabilities of a missionary vocation, none other than Mlle. Anne Tiercin, Sister Saint Liguori's younger sister. Her father had given his permission and concurred in her plans by giving her an education which would fit her to render valuable service in the missionary field.

Some echoes, however, must have escaped from the confidential letters ordered by Mother Mary to be written to her after Father Buteux's anonymous letter, and now M. Tiercin was loath to send another daughter to a Community which was in danger of shipwreck. "It seems," he wrote to Sister Saint Liguori, "that your Community is on the verge of ruin."

I do not know how it has happened, wrote Sister Francis Xavier, that rumors very disadvantageous to our house have been current at Fougères. Things have gone so far that Mlle. Tiercin, who had decided to come here, is going to enter the novitiate of the Sisters of Evron . . . I have a frightful fear of having written something to Ruillé which could have given rise to these false reports, for they are absolutely false. . . . Our house is in good condition, silence is kept exactly, the spiritual exercises are made with regularity, the postulants love one another. . . . They do more when they kneel to ask permission to communicate than a Breton would by fasting on bread and water. Thus on the whole the order of our house is religious, and the best proof of it is that, if we were willing, it would be filled with Sisters who would leave their own Community to lead a holier life among us. My good Mother Saint Charles, reassure me. Tell me that I have not written anything that would injure a house to which God has conducted me with so much love. I would be so wicked if to harm my Sisters I abused the liberty that Sister Theodore gives me to write not only to Mother Mary, but to you and Sister Eudoxie without having my letters inspected.¹⁹

Bishop de la Hailandière seems to have blamed Sister Saint Francis severely for her lack of discretion and justice in reporting matters which were misinterpreted in Europe. "I am going to write to your Mother," he wrote to her, "that I wish her to read your letters."

Poverty was pressing heavily upon the Community. Consonant with the Bishop's wishes, the accounts for 1842 reveal the most careful and the strictest economy. No single item appears except absolute necessities, flour, butter, eggs, wages to the workmen, and now and then payments to different individuals "on account." During the summer Mother Theodore began to remark, however, what seemed a concerted action upon the part of merchants in Terre Haute and others to whom the Community owed money to demand payment at once. Considering the widespread currency of anti-convent literature, peddled so successfully through the Western country, it is not surprising perhaps that Terre Haute had its own minor escaped nun agitation. Miss Mary Doyle, our sometime Sister Aloysia, had found many to espouse her cause in the city, not only among Protestants, which would be more or less expected, but even among Catholics. The estimable widow, Mrs. Susan Andrews Williams, not only defended and protected Miss Doyle, but she joined with her by opening an opposition school to force the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to close their little *pensionnat*. They continued to lose pupils from the début of the new school,

¹⁹ A Mère Saint Charles, 3 août, 1842. S.M.W.A.

and when classes were resumed in the fall, very few pupils presented themselves.

The bad influence of Sister Aloysia, instead of diminishing, increases daily, wrote Mother Theodore in August. She has nearly all our former boarders and those who were to have come to us. . . . This year we will be able to do very little good, but we hope this trial will pass.²⁰

A brief advertisement in Terre Haute announced the opening of school on September 5, and in consideration of the hard times, the reduction of the yearly terms from one hundred to eighty dollars.

The pupils paid however intermittently after the fashion of the frontier, something the French Sisters found it painful to be obliged to imitate.

One thing which astonishes me greatly, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to her mother, is the fashion here of contracting debts. From the highest to the lowest, everyone follows it. Ah, my poor mother, I would rather accustom myself to eating with my knife and to speaking English than to adopting this fashion. Father has too often told us that if we could not afford to buy ordinary shoes, we must wear wooden ones. Our boarders to be in the fashion do not pay us. After all, we must take things as they are.²¹

"Do like everyone else and do not pay cash," wrote the Bishop.²² Now they were compelled to conform to his advice, and the resulting debts were a source of keen suffering. "As to the money question, believe me, pay as little as possible; in that you will do as others do. Except for small accounts, no one expects ready money." Sister Saint Francis Xavier with her customary candor reveals details of their position which Mother Theodore hardly mentions:

During Mother Theodore's illness two of our horses died. Only one remains, and it is sick. For what concerns me individually, I find myself very rich, but I suffer from the situation of the house in general. Persons whom we owe are coming continually to ask for money, and we have none. The Bishop is in the same position. We do not buy the least thing beyond what is necessary, but you know one must be fed and clothed. I hope the good God will come to our assistance and, either from France or from America, help will come to us, for except by a miracle we cannot continue to exist without money. Paper is very expensive here, thirty francs a ream, pens and other school supplies in proportion.

Your little iron pens have given great pleasure. Everything which was in my trunk has been useful, even my great red and black sheath. That special dress, which I cared so little to bring, I had the pleasure of seeing worn by one of our poor children. Ah, if we had the old things you used to give to Sister Dorothee, we would do wonders with them. . . . When you receive this letter you will be nearing the time of the retreat. Most of my dear companions of the novitiate will take their vows, I hope. O my dear novitiate! Tell the novices to pray for me, and tell me of them, I beg of you, and also of the new arrivals. Be kind enough too to send us your method and the regulations for the retreats you conduct. Mother Theodore wishes this very much.

At the end of her long letter finely written in her pointed script and criss-crossed to save postage, she adds, "I know not whether you can read

²⁰ A Mère Saint Charles, 24 août, 1842. S.M.W.A.

²¹ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 226.

²² 17 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

my letter, but you will always understand the heart of your child Irma, Sister Francis Xavier."²³

One explanation of their distress is a note in the diary in Mother Theodore's writing on February 10, 1842, "The Illinois bank has failed; all the money we have is in that bank." When the Bishop audited and signed their accounts in December, 1841, ninety-one dollars remained to their account. Evidently now that too was gone. How truly could Mother Theodore write of her little Community,

daughters of four different nations assembled here in a little chapel under the protection of the Lord in the heart of the dense woods, having nothing in the world but Him for support and for protector. . . . I believe Our Lord loves and protects these dear children, who for His love live here in the midst of the thick forest. His care of us shows His Providence. I give you an instance among many proofs. At the time we were obliged to dismiss the only one who could teach English and other branches requiring extensive knowledge, good Father Perché came bringing us two postulants who know English well, and one who knows music well enough to teach beginners, which she does for two hours a day with great success.

I wished at this time to give instructions on the religious spirit and the obligation of the vows, but it was pitiful to hear me. This zealous priest remained with our chaplain ten days and gave us for an hour and a quarter every day an instruction, which was of inestimable benefit to these dear Sisters who have not the least idea of those subjects. . . . They give us, however, very sweet consolation when, after some time passed here, they become meek, humble, charitable, and entirely devoted to God. . . . As to temporals, I have had visible proofs of the paternity of our good God. The other day I did not know which way to turn. I did not have a penny, and I had to feed our household. Just then came a letter from Mr. Byerley with a hundred dollars. This good gentleman has given us more than three thousand francs since we have been in America. Pray for him and for his six sisters in England who are still Protestants.²⁴

By this time the memory of the hardships and sufferings of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's long voyage had faded, and she could write gaily to Sister Eudoxie:

How many things I would have to tell you which would make you laugh. I would begin by my voyage from Le Mans to Havre, of my night in the stage coach with M. Dupont who engaged me to make the Way of the Cross. Afterwards were vocal prayers to which I did not know the responses and discussion on spiritual subjects of which I did not even know the names. . . . He is the holiest man, the humblest, the most in love with Our Lord that I have ever met. You could not help admiring the simplicity of his faith. I would tell you next of my embarrassment at Havre, of Abbé Sorin's disgust at taking me, of my ocean voyage of which you have heard, of my sojourn at New York, of Madame de Galitzin, this Russian princess, one of the simplest souls, the most poor in spirit one could meet. I traveled with her only as far as Philadelphia. . . . Most amusing and most dreadful of all was my journey from Philadelphia to Vincennes with all Mr. Bellier's tall young men; finally my interview with Monseigneur. I am a child to laugh at all this with you. In heaven we shall meet again and wonder how with poor little beings like us, God has done something.²⁵

During all this anxious year of 1842 the Community continued to grow in numbers. In May Monseigneur accompanied to the novitiate Elizabeth

²³ 5 mai, 1842. S.M.W.A.

²⁴ A Mère Saint Charles, 28 février, 1842. S.M.W.A.

²⁵ Jour de l'Ascension, 1842. S.M.W.A.

Lalumiere. Father Lalumiere's niece, whose serious eye trouble had yielded to treatment, and Augusta Linck of Evansville. The latter was the daughter of Francis X. Linck, the first and long the only Catholic in Evansville. Augusta Linck was known in the Community as Sister Mary Magdalen. She was one of the Sisters chosen by the Bishop when the Sisters of Providence took over the school in Vincennes and was the first beloved Superior of Saint Augustine's, Fort Wayne. She died holily at the motherhouse September 2, 1873.

Eliza Carroll, later known as Sister Seraphine, arrived at the novitiate in July with a letter for Mother Theodore from her director, Father de Saint-Palais. She was of a gay and lighthearted character, and he had told her that when she became a Sister, she could never laugh again. Her surprise at the peals of merriment she heard at her first recreation among the postulants quickly convinced her to the contrary. Sister Seraphine's life in religion was short, as within six years she fell a victim to tuberculosis, so rife and so little understood in pioneer days in the United States.

The annual retreat was approaching, this year as all during the early years to be preached by one of the good French priests of the diocese, Father Vincent Baquelin. This pious, devoted and zealous young priest had come to America with Bishop Bruté's colony in 1836. He remained at Emmitsburg to complete his studies and was ordained there with the Reverend Julian Benoit in 1837. Bishop Bruté appointed him pastor of the missions in Shelby County, where he built St. Vincent's Church. His death in 1846 by a fall from his horse while returning from a sick call was a very great loss to the diocese. Father Baquelin arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods a few days in advance of the opening of the retreat on August 6, feast of the Transfiguration. All were present except the three Jasper Sisters, who did not receive Mother Theodore's letter announcing the date of the exercises. At the close of the retreat on the feast of the Assumption Sister Basilide pronounced her perpetual vows, having been fifteen years in the Community. Sister Saint Liguori made her first profession for five years, and four postulants received the religious habit: Sister Augustine or Austin, Sister Mary Cecilia, Sister Mary Celestia, and Sister Therese. Monseigneur officiated at the simple little ceremony in the forest chapel assisted by Father Baquelin and left at once for the northern missions of his diocese. Sister Saint Liguori had to be dispensed by the Bishop from part of her three-year novitiate as she was to be superior of Father Ducoudray's school at Saint Francisville opening on October 18.

Anti-Catholic animus and agitation in the United States had been growing steadily since its organization in 1830 after the passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act in England. Thirty anti-Catholic papers were in existence in America in 1827, and a torrent of books and pamphlets followed, which were sold cheap and eventually reached everyone who could read.²⁰ The decade from 1830 to 1840 saw powerful anti-Catholic societies formed by Protestant ministers. The great Hughes-Breckenridge and Purcell-Campbell debates, with others of lesser moment, took place in this decade, and Mount Saint Benedict, the Ursuline convent at Charlestown, Massachusetts, was burned to the ground at night by a mob. At

²⁰ Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade* (Macmillan, New York, 1938), p. 45.

this period too the flood of anti-convent literature reached its peak in the calumnious books of Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk, "which took the country by storm."²⁷ Lecturers and pedlars toured the land, spreading anti-Catholic propaganda and selling books. In the mid 30's anti-foreign animus was added to the cry of "No Popery," and here the Middle West came into prominence as the scene of a pseudo scheme for Catholic control of the Mississippi Valley by placing Catholic immigrants beyond the Alleghenies. When Lyman Beecher went from New England to become president of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, he continued to inflame public opinion by violent anti-Catholic sermons. He inveighed against the parochial schools in particular as part of the plot to secure the West.²⁸

Political nativism added its venom to this carefully planned agitation in the late 1830's, and its first peak was reached in Harrison's presidential campaign.²⁹ The great school fund movement under Archbishop Hughes ran for some time afterwards, complicated by the bigoted textbooks, the reading of the King James's Bible, and the Protestant prayers, which were forced upon Catholic children in the public schools of New York. Part of this cleverly organized campaign was directed against Protestants sending their children to Catholic schools. The Western country was naturally not free from this nationwide agitation, and Cincinnati was headquarters for much anti-Catholic propaganda. It was in fact to remedy the nativistic demonstrations and rioting in Cincinnati that Archbishop Purcell began the special honor to Mary Immaculate, first inserting the word *immaculate* in the preface of the Mass,³⁰ which was followed at the Baltimore Council of 1846 by the choice of Mary Conceived without Sin as patroness of the United States.³¹ The addition to the litany of the invocation "Queen conceived without original sin" and the establishment of December 8 as a holyday of obligation years later belong in this same series of events.³²

The year 1842 was a tragic one in Indiana. It witnessed the beginnings of the travesty of justice by which one of Bishop de la Hailandière's recruits of 1839, an innocent young Alsatian priest, Roman Weinzoepfeln, was eventually sentenced to the state penitentiary at Jeffersonville, from which he was not liberated until a year later through the remonstrances of Mrs. James K. Polk, when she and the President-elect were on their way up the Ohio to Washington in 1845. Small wonder if the prejudice which could countenance such judicial injustice began to make itself felt in the forests of Vigo County against the defenceless Sisters of Providence and their little school.

Anti-foreign agitation also was growing apace. The sight of crowds of poor Irish immigrants dying of the dreaded "ship fever," a species of typhoid, or of the gaunt figures which crept from the Cunard steerage at New York later intensified the idea that certain European countries were

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 108.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁹ Guilday, *A History of the Councils of Baltimore*, p. 119.

³⁰ Advised by Father Theodore de Theux, S.J. (Garraghan, vol. 1, p. 485).

³¹ Lambing, *Sacramentals of the Catholic Church*, (Benziger Brothers, Inc., N. Y., 1892), p. 323.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 325.

deliberately using America as a semi-penal colony for paupers and potential criminals.³³ This agitation found its little field also against the poor French nuns in the wilds of Vigo County.

. . . no one can form an idea of what is done here against the character of the French, wrote Mother Theodore . . . these bad results have affected our good Bishop especially. He is sad, even gloomy, colder than American, never satisfied with anything.³⁴

Things were growing more serious from day to day:

I have just discovered that there is a conspiracy in Terre Haute to destroy our institution. The persons responsible for this had begun by prejudicing against us the families whose children were here last year. Only one pupil returned this fall, and she, it seems, had no other home. I was greatly distressed, for burdened as we are with debts and having no funds with which to pay them, I looked upon the failure of our boarding school as a great misfortune, all the greater because it would render impossible fulfilling the end of our vocation, the education of youth.

This prospect was sufficiently alarming, but that was not all. Friday morning a boy whom I had sent to Terre Haute brought me a note from a dealer in whom I had confidence and who furnished us what we needed.³⁵ We had paid this man about four hundred and fifty francs on our account. On Friday, however, he wrote us that he would give us nothing more except for cash. All the others to whom we owed anything seemed to have given word to one another to come almost all together to ask for their money. We were reduced to the necessity of giving them linen, dresses, pieces of muslin and calico, and so forth, or the coffee and sugar the Bishop had procured for us in Louisville in exchange for butter, soap, and other things of absolute necessity.³⁶

Samuel Crawford was one of two brothers of Scottish origin who maintained a general store for a number of years in Terre Haute. Dry goods, groceries, hardware, in fact almost everything of ordinary demand, were included in his stock in trade, and the Community purchases were ordinarily made in his store. Mother Theodore's usual practice had been to pay cash, and this continued to be done even with the country people who often preferred to sell their surplus farm products to the Sisters for cash rather than to the Terre Haute dealers, who only paid by an order for merchandise. As their tuition bills were not promptly settled and yet pupils and Sisters must be maintained, poverty continued to become more and more pressing. As the Bishop failed to approve their practice of paying their current expenses as they were incurred, they were forced to begin to buy provisions on credit.

To careful Frenchwomen, accustomed to keep their expenses rigidly within their income, their debts were a bitter trial. In February, 1842, Mother Theodore records their indebtedness as nearly a thousand dollars, but the Bishop had promised to pay it within a year, probably from his subsidies from France. He disappointed the Community very much when the time came however by preferring to improve and add to their little convent at the same time that he built the new parish church. The farm had thus far provided almost all the food necessary, but two cows, which must supply milk for forty persons, did not make it possible to make

³³ Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 134.

³⁴ A Mère Marie, 26 février, 1842. S.M.W.A.

³⁵ Samuel Crawford.

³⁶ A Mère Marie, 3 octobre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

butter. Eggs and wheat flour, too, had to be bought. Money was alarmingly scarce. The panic of 1837 was still sharply felt all over the Wabash country, but Mother Theodore mentions on July 24, twenty dollars paid to Crawford; August 21, she paid him fifty dollars; again September 15, \$66.27. On September 28 she "received for sugar, coffee, etc., \$51.80," probably one of the exchanges she had referred to. These continued payments on Crawford's account make it evident that his sudden change of attitude toward the Community was not the result of apprehension as to payment, but of aversion for the Sisters personally. They knew of the reversal of attitude towards them in Terre Haute, which was augmented by the presence in the city of their ex-Sister Aloysia and the imprudent remarks and confidences of their ex-chaplain. The Bishop was the main sufferer from this latter cause, and public opinion in Terre Haute had become so roused against him that they were plotting to get rid of him.³⁷

Anxious thoughts beset Mother Theodore on Friday morning, September 30, when the boy employed on the farm returned sooner than usual from Terre Haute, minus the provisions but bearing the peremptory note from Mr. Crawford. Several of the Sisters were with her in her room when the lad entered. The burden of the communication was that the merchant required immediate payment as he wished to close accounts with the Sisters.³⁸ Mother Theodore could not conceal her consternation. "For a moment she seemed overpowered."³⁹ Her silence and her stricken look revealed the bitter blow she had received. It was impossible to hide her painful anxiety, but with her usual determination her mind began to dart to and fro with harassed anxiety for a solution. Cash! and she had no money. They could not starve, and they must be clothed. Happily the harvest had been fairly successful. A hundred and fifty bushels of wheat, nearly the same amount of oats, also hay and corn sufficient for the winter forage for the animals were safely stored in the large barn with other provisions for the winter, bacon, lard, shucks for the ticks which took the place of springs on the beds. Then perhaps an order from the Bishop might secure them additional credit. She must write for that at once. For the present they could exist.

But the depth of their misfortune had not yet been reached. On Saturday, October 1, everyone worked all day gathering in the last of the winter forage for the stock. Next day, Sunday, October 2, was retreat Sunday, feast of the Holy Angels and the Holy Rosary, and Mother Theodore's birthday, her forty-fourth. The lovely October haze lay upon the forest; the soft warmth of autumn, at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods the loveliest season of the year, was in the air. The weather was however ominously warm and dry. The religious quiet of retreat reigned in the little convent, and Mother Theodore had gone at once to her room after dinner. She was sitting there quietly conversing with a novice who had come for a spiritual conference. Suddenly the unwonted sound of hurrying feet broke upon their ears, and the dreadful cry, "Fire! Fire!" from the lips of a postulant running towards them. The Community with one impulse rushed to the

³⁷ A Mgr. Bouvier, 6 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

³⁸ Mother Cecilia's Manuscript.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

doors, and there on the little eminence since known as Saint Anne's, the farmhouse was ablaze. In an instant everyone ran to get buckets and vessels to carry water. The flames had already consumed part of the roof, and sparks were falling everywhere carried by the wind. Seeing that the house was doomed, the Sisters began to try to save the contents of the adjacent barn, but firebrands from the burning house fell upon the straw scattered about on the ground at the barn door, and set fire to the barn. The Sisters who had gone inside barely had time to escape before the barn was a fiery furnace.

In less than three minutes the two buildings containing our wagons, plows, and all the farm implements constituted an immense oven from which a bright and circling flame rose to a prodigious height and threw to a great distance a shower of sparks. Carried by a brisk, though not high wind, the sparks kindled fires all around making the first one still more terrible. The green trees beginning to turn caught fire as well as those which were dry.⁴⁰

The workers now saw that all they could hope to do was to prevent the fire from becoming a general conflagration and save the fences, the little stable, and the convent, which were all in imminent danger on account of the wind. If it had risen even only a little, the poor wooden convent could not have been saved. Their first thought was to cover the boards of the roof with wet sheets, but they had no water, neither well nor spring. They had thus far got what was absolutely indispensable from a small natural stream which ran down the ravine but which was barely sufficient for the needs of the house. Prayer and confidence in God were thus their only resource. Mother Theodore left for a moment the group of Sisters and workmen still toiling round the fire to go for a brief instant to kneel before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel, beseeching Him to save this house which belonged to Him and in which He deigned to dwell. Then filled with new strength and courage she returned to the workers.

The fire was burning with inconceivable fury. Everything was on fire. Nothing could be seen but fire, and sparks fell upon us, particularly from the trees. The men were there, working at top speed. We had them cut down those trees which though the most beautiful were the most dangerous because of their height. They took their axes and hewed away with all their might in this species of purgatory. Some half consumed pieces of wood fell around them, and immediately fire broke out in the clothes of one, in the hair of another, and in the hat of a third. Almost all of us have burns, but by a special Providence, no one has been seriously hurt. My hand is burned, but that is a small matter.⁴¹

At four o'clock the wind died down, and the fire no longer raised and spread by it, burned less fiercely. The weary and heart-broken Sisters could pause a moment. Then too they realized the seriousness of their loss. Mother Theodore's countenance told the painful thoughts that filled her mind. Breathless and overheated from the violent exertion to put out the fire, she gave up only when every effort was proved to be useless. Their sole alternative now was to look on at the destruction of their only means of subsistence. The half burnt logs, the posts and beams finally collapsed

⁴⁰ Mother Theodore à Mère Marie, 3 octobre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

into a smouldering heap and blazed more quietly. Then Mother Theodore sent for the wine they had received from Soulaines, which they had been guarding so carefully for the Holy Mass. Making a refreshing beverage from it with sugar and water, she had it passed to the men, workmen and neighbors, who had toiled unremittingly for hours to prevent the spreading of the fire. They continued to watch all night near the ruined buildings, for the wheat, "our dear wheat, all threshed."⁴² continued to burn for many hours, and the flames were seen for miles away in every direction against the sky.

The danger was not over for a rising wind would have carried the sparks out over the woods starting a forest fire, or in the other direction toward the convent which, constructed as it was entirely of wood, could not have been saved. Fortunately the air had become perfectly still. Not a leaf on the trees was stirring. Before noon next day, Mother Theodore could write: "Our dear Lord has preserved us, and at this moment, eleven o'clock in the morning, everything leads us to hope that the worst is over."⁴³

Their first impulse naturally was to search for the cause of the fire. Knowing the prejudice against them which was rife in Terre Haute, the Sisters believed at first that the fire was of incendiary origin, and Mother Theodore wrote to this effect to France:

This sad event appears to be the result of malice. It seems impossible that it could have happened otherwise. The fire showed itself on the outside about seven feet above ground in a board of the gable of the farmhouse. The fence had been broken down on the side of the woods about twenty steps away. This must have been done during High Mass, and the fire started and covered up so that it did not break out until half an hour after midday.⁴⁴

Convents had been burned in the United States, and Sisters driven with their pupils out into the night. Perhaps this fate would yet be theirs. One fact was assured. They were now destitute. The provisions they had counted upon for winter were gone. They had nothing, no money, no friends, no food. Gaunt spectres of want and loneliness and failure haunted the sombre autumn woods and peered in at the tiny windows of the miserable shack they called their convent. Only their invincible confidence in Divine Providence was left, and in this their darkest hour it did not desert them.

After the grief and excitement had somewhat abated, other causes were brought forward as possibly responsible for the fire. Father Sorin, writing from Saint Peter's, had heard of the fire but was loath to credit its incendiary origin. He congratulated Mother Theodore again and again on her faith and trust in God and insisted that even if the enemies of the Community were to try to destroy her work, she would have only another motive for increased confidence in God. "I believe that Our Lord wishes to show you through the flames of your fire more than one truth of the spiritual life. If therefore you can buy at this price some lasting convictions and some merits for eternity, do not regret your house nor your little store

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

of provisions nor anything whatever.”⁴⁵ Mother Cecilia writing many years later stated that the carelessness in smoking of the men in service who occupied the log house was the origin of the fire. The Bishop blamed Marcile, the superintendent in charge of the work on the church. In any case the loss was complete and irreparable. Mother Theodore must have permitted herself to express her anxiety in writing to Bishop de la Hailandière. He found her fears exaggerated:

It is certain, my good daughter, that your letter is from a person who, if not discouraged, is at least depressed beyond measure. Is it not really passing the bounds of truth to say: “In eight days I shall have no more bread?” He who almost alone loses the most in this conflagration, the cause of your sadness, is he who must rebuild what has been destroyed. Again is it quite true that you are “surrounded by enemies and without defense?” And why this complaint so often renewed, “in the midst of a forest?” And my silence, can you not understand that after an absence of seven weeks I may have many affairs on hand, some of great importance which require all my time? I beg of you, my daughter, in your own interest and for my consolation, do not write those things to me. Be calm, walk gently in the Presence of God. Have a little confidence in Him. I mean practically. . . . Why not ask for the things that are necessary without an order from me? The strictest economy does not exclude those things. In the past, did you not act with more simplicity than that? Twenty dollars for you.⁴⁶

The Community was now reduced to a very critical position. The problems attendant upon their remoteness and isolation were further complicated by dire poverty and anti-Catholic hostility. To the inexplicable silence of the French superiors was added the strained situation with the Bishop of Vincennes, which was assuming greater proportions from day to day. Nevertheless the urgent needs and duties of the hour must be met courageously. The apples and potatoes were gathered during the days immediately following the fire, and on October 20 Mother Theodore left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to accompany Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine, who were to open the second mission of the Community in Father Louis Ducoudray’s parish at Saint Francisville, as we have seen. They took possession of their house on the twenty-third, and Mother Theodore was again at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on the twenty-seventh. Retrenchment along every line was now necessary.

The work of the farm was practically over for the year, and the Community, if it was to weather the winter, must prepare to reduce expenses to the bare minimum. Two of the employes on the farm were dismissed. Their labor was really needed, but there was no food for them, no money to pay them. Richardville was retained, and he continued to work on the fences to enclose the immediate premises of the *pensionnat* and convent. Père Michel was occupied in cutting wood all winter, an occupation he had practiced in his youth on the mountains of his native Alsace. In the severe cold the wide open fireplaces devoured great quantities of fuel without warming the little wooden convent, and the Sisters shivered while their faces near the fire were burning. The last corn left till now was gathered, and Joseph Thralls’s old grist mill in the meadow they sold for a thousand pounds of wheat flour, which would insure bread at least for the coming

⁴⁵ A Mother Theodore, 12 octobre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁶ A Mother Theodore, 9 octobre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

months. A little later three young calves were exchanged for a hundred bushels of corn to replace the forage lost in the fire.

The first week in November the Bishop arrived, his first visit since the fire, and after his return to Vincennes he sent two barrels of sugar and one of coffee which helped to relieve the shortage of food. He later sent a hundred dollars which he had borrowed, and their devoted friend, Mr. Samuel Byerley, who had heard of their misfortune, sent a gift of an equal amount. When the latter sum arrived, for three days the Sisters had been without bread.

In December Mother Theodore described the situation to Mother Mary:

For meat we have killed some of our animals and have exchanged others for oats and corn. This is how bargains are made in our woods. If we need butter, tallow, soap, etc., we are obliged to give in exchange sugar or coffee or cotton print or calico, etc. Of money there is very little in the United States; the country is almost ruined. More than a thousand dollars is due us, which is equivalent to over five thousands francs of our money, and it is impossible to get a single penny.

Our creditors, however, torment us like mad men. I have paid about a hundred dollars of the amount received from Monseigneur and Mr. Byerley, but it is like a drop of oil on a fire. It only intensifies their thirst for money, and this money famine may cause our destruction in this country where we thought our Congregation was called to do so much good. While I have been writing to you, the worst of all these enemies entered my room. He came to get money of which I have not a sou, but he was not too ill-natured, much less so indeed than the previous time. We owe him about three hundred francs.⁴⁷

The winter of 1842-1843, which was exceptionally severe, was now upon them, and from early November the forest, the little fields, the orchard, and dooryard were buried deep under the snow. The bitterly cold wind turned everything into ice, freezing even the feet of the stock. A circumstance which contributed to their privations at this time was the increase in the boarding school. After October additional pupils began to enroll gradually. They now counted about fifteen, and though very few paid anything, it seemed better to keep them than to close the school. Naturally whatever provisions were on hand had to go to the pupils first. The general status of the school, far from deteriorating, was in reality improved. Teachers, God had now provided in adequate number, and there were at least five members of the Community capable of filling Sister Aloysia's place and even better endowed than she.

In these days of growing privation and anxiety, Sister Olympiade proved a treasure to the Community. She was placed at the *pensionnat* with Sister Basilide and Sister Therese, "a good German lay sister, full of faith and good will,"⁴⁸ who was again this year cook for the children. Sister Olympiade multiplied her devotedness and her activity. No labor, no matter how hard or how menial was beyond her. At the academy she had charge of the lingerie, an employment which at that time included the care of the children's linen and laundering and mending it. In addition, she was Community baker, supplying the bread for the complement of some forty persons, and she cared also for all the stock, the pigs and cows, their forage

⁴⁷ A Mère Marie, 15 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

and bedding. She was infirmarian, too, and sick nurse, accomplishing cheerfully in her own person labor sufficient for two or even three persons and never late or negligent.

Circumstances and need were developing unwonted depths of energy and fortitude and devotedness in the other members of the Community also, qualities of which they would have dire need in the dark days ahead. If the early history of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods falls into two large divisions, the seven years of "our troubles," as the term came to be used, and the later eight years of peace, the four years, 1843 to 1847 were crucial. During all these four tragic years, the Community was struggling for its very existence. Mother Theodore's life span in America was something over fifteen years and a half,⁴⁰ a period, the lifetime of the Foundress, basic in the establishment of any religious group, but in Mother Theodore's case, considering the magnitude of her task, unusually brief. Her poor health, her almost constant physical sufferings, her isolation, and the lack of moral encouragement and support from her superiors combined to perfect her personal sanctification in a comparatively short time and won for her struggling Community graces of which it is probably still reaping the fruit.

The French superiors seemed to have agreed to let the American foundation fend for itself. Mother Mary knew that she had given the best the Ruillé Community had in giving Mother Theodore. That she had been for some years under a cloud was at Ruillé an open secret. Sister Saint Francis Xavier acknowledged her uneasiness in coming to a house whose superior was not approved at the Motherhouse. The spectacle of Mother Theodore's complete resignation and submission under her many heavy crosses soon convinced Sister Saint Francis of her heroic virtue. Under neglect and indifference, the faith and love and devotion of the Foundress only burned the brighter. After her critical illness of January, 1841, no word of sympathy or interest came from Ruillé till the following June, and after that, an entire year elapsed before they had any further word from France.

In 1842 when the financial panic was rendering so precarious the situation of the little Community in the woods, Ruillé was amassing in advance as was customary a complete fund to build an addition to the motherhouse. It was *de rigueur* to have every penny in the bank before the first sod was turned. All the additions to Ruillé were made under these conditions, and a steady series of improvements went on during those years. Of the boxes received at different times from Europe only one from Sister Saint Bernard from Vitré was "by order of our Mother Mary." This complete oblivion and neglect was, as Mother Theodore many times acknowledged, by far the heaviest of her many bitter crosses. Yet God was preparing for her if possible a still more poignant trial, and one too which came from the very quarter from which she had a right to expect help and consolation and encouragement. For many months now she had no longer been able to command from the Bishop anything but disapproval and reproofs.

Yet in preparing and sending her these trials God was giving her in the one placed nearest her by circumstances also an unexpected support

⁴⁰ Fifteen years, six months, and twenty-two days.

and help. Sister Saint Francis Xavier's character was developing rapidly amid the hardships and privations of her beloved mission. Physically she was never able to cope with the hard work of the farm, the rolling of logs and burning brush, the corn shucking and gathering of crops and fruit, and Mother Theodore seems never to have permitted her to share the labors in which she herself was always at the head. All day on October 2, the dreadful day of the fire, Sister Saint Francis was completely incapacitated, ill in bed. Her progress in sanctity however was already very marked and was evident, not only to the postulants with whom practically all her time was spent, but also to the Sisters and especially to the one who knew her best, Mother Theodore. Simply and humbly she accepted the verdict of Ruillé upon her, "good only to love God" and she lived up to it to the letter. But her love of God gradually transformed her. Her timidity and hesitations eventually disappeared to give way to a rocklike integrity and rectitude of judgment, to a heroic courage which, added to her burning zeal, made her an apostle within and without the Community, a victim of love and a tower of strength in the years of bitter trial which were approaching.

Father Perché, who had remained for ten days at his visit at Christmas in 1841, had an opportunity to study the Sisters, and in a letter still extant gave Mother Theodore his observations and directions concerning each of them. His was the first decidedly adverse opinion concerning Sister Aloysia, which Mother Theodore received. He even went so far as to say that her strange behavior at night when she was occupying a room at the academy with Sister Mary Celestia betrayed a soul tormented by the demon. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had at that time been only a month at Saint Mary-of-the Woods, but on his advice Mother Theodore had appointed her mistress of novices, a position which she filled capably despite her poor command of English. The same difficulty, which had at home in France made her sisters despair of teaching her to sing, militated against her learning the new language. She acquired it very slowly, and after a year in America could only understand it passably and made many humiliating mistakes. Once when a postulant asked her what employment she would have for the week, Sister Saint Francis understood that the postulant was dizzy and had a pain in her eyes, and she rushed to render assistance. "I am in a good situation for humiliations," she wrote, "and I am beginning to find them not so painful. . . . If I could only appreciate them."⁵⁰

At first her only employment was to teach the perfect practice of the religious life to the young aspirants, principally by her example. Gradually, however, she was compelled, despite her timidity, to replace Mother Theodore during her journeys and her illnesses:

At present my employment has no name. I am still nothing except occasionally and at intervals, but I wish to try to resign myself to being all that God wills. There is a great deal of pride in rebelling interiorly and saying I do not wish the employments that God wishes to give me. I intend to try to place myself in such a state of abandonment that if the good God wishes absolutely that I be even pope, I will say yes. My poor Sister Saint Charles, abandonment in words is very easy, but when the occasion presents itself, I am nothing that I have promised.⁵¹

⁵⁰ A Mère Marie, 29 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁵¹ A Mère Saint Charles, 29 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

To Sister Eudoxie she gives a picture of her exterior at this time which corresponds rather closely to the traditions still extant in the Community. "I am a little less disorderly in my affairs, a little more proper in my appearance. As for my cap, I have no good news to give you. It is always a little askew." In Mother Theodore's absence and during her month-long illness, there was no one to replace her but Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Sister Basilide was at the Academy, and after March, 1842, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer was at Jasper. Sister Saint Francis was therefore the only professed Sister at Providence. She found her position very conducive to humility,

especially during Mother Theodore's absence when the postulants come to me to ask permission to receive Holy Communion. Sister Basilide is all day at the *pensionnat* . . . Sister Saint Vincent is at Jasper, and Sister Olympiade has the care of the children's linen at the *pensionnat*. I am the only one left who has made her vows, and as a consequence during the absence and the illness of our superior I was obliged to see to the maintenance of the rule. I think the good God has placed me there like the straw figures in the cherry trees to prevent the birds from eating the fruit. Oh, if you could have seen me! But you have prayed for me, and pray, oh, pray for this poor little Community so deprived of capable subjects. I cannot tell you how we lack, more in one respect, less in another, what reasonably speaking is necessary to succeed.⁶²

Mother Theodore however formed a very different estimate of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's capabilities:

The saint of the house is Sister Saint Francis, who is truly an angel of virtue. I believe that this child would struggle efficaciously against all the efforts of hell to destroy us. Her example animates and confounds me. I am near her in the chapel distracted with temporalities and business, and I see her lost in God and melting with love for our Lord. I had asked her to warn me of my faults, and she complies with admirable simplicity. When I have done something amiss, I say to myself that I may expect a visit from Sister Saint Francis, which never fails. Another and very important service which she renders is that of remaining always with the postulants, a duty which is absolutely impossible for me, having work which would require two or three persons to do well.⁶³

To Mother Theodore's anxious thoughts for the future of the Community, her distress at the prejudice and ill feeling rife against the school in Terre Haute, and the isolation in which she had to live, from about this time on must be added the displeasure of the Bishop. Its source lay not only in his strange character but also in the circumstances under which the Sisters had come to Indiana. The Rule required a contract between the Bishop of Le Mans and the ordinary of any locality where the Sisters might settle, stipulating the reciprocal expenses and obligations of the contracting parties, "to avoid as far as possible the inconveniences which might result from time and changes."⁶⁴ Bishop Bouvier postponed this very desirable and necessary procedure in regard to the Vincennes mission owing to his complete ignorance of the possibilities and needs of the enterprise. Sister Theodore made one request only, the daily Mass, which was theirs in general from their arrival.

⁶² A ma Soeur Eudoxie, 5 mai, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁶³ A Mère Marie, 15 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁴ *Constitution et Règles*, 1835, p. 24.

Mother Mary seems to have intended from the beginning that the Indiana mission would be a distinct and separate foundation. The Sisters never knew this, and Sister Basilide joined the group with the definite understanding that there would be no separation from Ruillé. Bishop de la Hailandière's letters in 1840 and 1841 show a willingness to permit the Sisters to remain united with their French motherhouse, but by 1842 his determination was already taken to allow no intervention from Ruillé in the affairs of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. This appeared unmistakably in the question of Mlle. Bernard. The Bishop had also been deeply offended when Mother Theodore had urged him to buy Thralls's property.⁵⁵ He had inexplicably expected them to spend the winter with the family. Mother Theodore's uncertainties and uneasiness regarding her own proper line of conduct are evident in her confidential letters to France, to the superiors at Ruillé and to Bishop Bouvier. Her need of advice and encouragement appears also in Sister Saint Francis Xavier's letters, in which she pleads with the French superiors to answer Mother Theodore's letters and to give her the counsel which her painful and difficult situation required so urgently.

The French Rule pointed out clearly in a special chapter the duties of the Sisters towards the Bishops. It also stated in precise terms that the government of the Community was vested in the Superior General. The Rule had not yet been translated. When asking Father Nicholas Petit, S.J., to make an English translation of the Community prayers, the Bishop withheld the Rule. "I gave Father Petit your prayer book to translate, but not the Constitutions. He seemed too anxious to have them."⁵⁶ Père Petit probably knew a good deal of the difficulties at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Another priest had been consulted as early as December, 1841, Father Napoleon J. Perché, afterwards Archbishop of New Orleans, and in 1842 he wrote to Mother Theodore:

Future foundations should have sufficient house and grounds. Require that those who wish to make this foundation, priest, bishop, or corporation, guarantee by a proper contract an annual sum proportioned to the number of Sisters. You must give a vigorous organization to your Congregation from the beginning. As this essential is often lacking in this country, good is done without rule or order, and therefore many enterprises laudable in themselves do not last. To avoid the difficulty you may have in this respect with the Bishop, you will do well to consult your superiors in France and receive orders from them on all that you consider useful to the success of your work. You must give precise details on all the points on which you need orders, and these commands coming from persons whom you are obliged to obey will save you from the trouble which the Bishop or others might create.

I share in all the trials which you are undergoing from the Bishop, but you must hold firm. . . . This is your duty. You know well that we must suffer persecution for justice sake. This is the way in which all the saints have walked. No doubt the harshest trials are those which come to us from persons we respect and esteem, but I am convinced that in the accomplishment of your duty you will recoil before no trial whatsoever.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Aux Soeurs du Conseil, 22 janvier, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁶ A Mother Theodore, 8 octobre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁷ M. Perché à Mother Theodore, n.d., 1842. S.M.W.A.

What Bishop de la Hailandière's ideas were as to the proper canonical relations between himself and the Community is not clear. That it was an auxiliary group whose activities were to depend exclusively upon his will must have been his persuasion from the start, and his procedure in this respect conflicted at once with the Rule under which the Sisters had been professed in France and under which they were already functioning in America. The first duty of the superior general and of every local superior is to see to the exact observance of the Rule. Bishop de la Hailandière had, like many French prelates of his time and especially earlier, a strong tinge of the Gallican ideas which gave him an exaggerated estimation of the extent of his authority. The Church as a wise and prudent mother carefully regulates the amount of authority confided to individuals. Even the Supreme Pontiff has his counselors, and in the case of members of religious Communities, vowed to obedience, the limits of their obligations are very carefully outlined.

In selecting candidates and forcing them upon the Community, the Bishop was pursuing a course of action which would prove destructive to the best organized body. In the case of Mlle. Bernard, who had been admitted and refused at Ruillé before the Sisters left France for America, Mother Theodore was in a specially painful position between Scylla and Charybdis. She had already experienced the weight of Mother Mary's displeasure, which was imminent if she received Mlle. Bernard; in refusing her she encountered the equally formidable danger of offending the Bishop. He knew that she had been judged to have no vocation in France, yet he encouraged her to come to America. After she reached Vincennes he announced two postulants, and without waiting for an answer to his letter, he brought her to St. Mary's. A rough draft of Mother Theodore's answer which had been dispatched to the Bishop is written in her penmanship on the back of his letter:

MY LORD AND FATHER,

Pardon me for not answering sooner the letter with which you honored me last week, but I was not able to do so having received it only yesterday at noon. We employed the rest of the day in praying and examining before God the affair that you have wished to place before us, without being able to decide anything in the matter. We could not say that we were willing to receive this young person into the novitiate having said *no* so solemnly as you know. We have refrained on the other hand from repeating this *no*. It would be too painful for us to pronounce it, fearing that it might not find an echo in the heart of our good father. We leave the matter therefore entirely in the hands of Your Lordship. Your wisdom will decide whether this young woman shall be admitted to the trial of the novitiate or not. We will approve whatever you do, persuaded as we are that at this time we have no other means of knowing the will of God.⁵⁴

Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Basilide, whom Mother Theodore had called from the chapel and whom she was in the very act of consulting upon the matter when the Bishop and the applicant arrived, were both in favor of receiving her, as he wished it so much. Later however Sister Saint Francis's timorous and delicate conscience took alarm:

My poor Mother, sometimes I have great uneasiness of mind on account of

⁵⁴ S.M.W.A.

Monseigneur. I wish to subject my judgment and my will to his decisions, but on our debts and on some other particulars, it is impossible for me to think as he does, and this gives me great pain. . . . For me who love so much to obey blindly, it will disturb me terribly if I must examine first. You will pray for me to the good God that, if I am obliged to disobey, it will be for His love and not to follow my own judgment and my own lights.

Oh, how often we need your counsel! God has given me the grace of having a superior who tries in everything to make Saint Mary-of-the-Woods conform to Ruillé. . . . Poor Sister Theodore! . . . sometimes your silence hurts her deeply, for she has no one to counsel her. "Oh," she says, "if our Mother were only here! If I knew what I ought to do." The number of our postulants augments in proportion as our resources diminish. I do not wish to probe with human eyes the depths of our position but rather to hope that the good God will have pity on us.⁶⁰

From Mother Saint Charles she begged for the advice and encouragement needed so badly. This revered superior, First Assistant till her death, was so deeply loved and held in such veneration by all the French Sisters in America that a missive to her was added to every letter to Mother Mary:

I do not know whether I ought to beg you to write to Mother Theodore. I think that she reaps much merit from offering the sacrifice to God, but according to my weak judgment, she has so many other things to suffer that a little encouragement and especially some advice from you would strengthen her. She was so happy to receive your excellent letters of last June in which you assured her that the past was forgotten, but alas, they promised her a letter from Mother Mary which has not come as yet. Sister Theodore thinks therefore that our Mother is still displeased. I supplicate you, my good Sister Saint Charles, to beg our Mother to write if only a few lines, not to me, though that would give me great pleasure, but to poor Sister Theodore.⁶⁰

The Bishop's intention to regulate the life of the Sisters on the missions independently of the motherhouse was a further source of difficulty. The harassed superior in a letter to Mother Mary sent by the same mail as Sister Saint Francis Xavier's missive reveals some of her difficulties, but with considerable trepidation lest they might become known:

O my good Mother, if we could only have you here for just a few weeks! How many things you would find to regulate. You would see our good Father with his double mind, but you would not find his heart. In our difficulties I often say to Sister Saint Francis, "Oh, if our Mother were only here!" Our greatest troubles have their source in this miserable money. If for a single day we could live to ourselves, we could accomplish much. . . . We are practicing the most rigid economy, and yet we are reproached with spending too much. What makes us suffer most is the desire the Bishop has for placing and displacing the Sisters. We had decided recently to send another to Sister Liguori, but he did not wish it. While I was at Vincennes after accompanying the Sisters to Francisville, I was desirous of going to see our Sisters at Jasper. They were all in distress, and Sister Saint Vincent was ill, but again he was unwilling. He wishes the establishments to depend on the priest, who is to furnish the Sisters whatever they need. He would receive the tuition money for the schools and would engage to pay fifty dollars for each Sister to the motherhouse.⁶¹

⁶⁰ A Mère Marie, 18 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁰ A Mère Saint Charles, 29 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁶¹ A Mère Marie, 29 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

In the Bishop's plans the missions were to be subjected only in name to the motherhouse, and the Sisters to be entirely under the supervision and direction of the parish priest in the smallest details of their daily life. This kind of administration was directly counter to the chapter of the Rule which regulated very strictly their relations with the clergy, and it was also highly imprudent in a Protestant country and at a time when nuns were exposed to the bitter calumnies of the anti-convent literature in the country.

Often, my good Mother, I know not which way to turn. I had thought at first that I could tell all my troubles and difficulties to Sister Saint Francis, but I was not slow to see that I was killing this poor child without benefiting myself. She passed her nights without sleeping, thinking that all was lost. I have thus been obliged to be silent, for what I whisper in the ears of Basilide she repeats aloud before her pupils.⁶²

A group of detached houses entirely severed from the motherhouse but under the close personal supervision of the Bishop, this was evidently his plan. He had tried it with Father Buteux when the Sisters first arrived in Indiana, but it had failed. Whatever its merits or demerits, it was not the type of life to which the French Sisters had subscribed in laying their hands upon the Gospels and kissing its sacred characters while pronouncing their religious engagements on their knees at the foot of the altar at Ruillé. Also breaking up thus a young Community and removing its only partially formed members from the inspiration, the safeguards, and helps of the novitiate and the motherhouse, was paving the path to ruin. The local superior at Saint Francisville was a young Sister, professed by dispensation in advance of the regular time in order to place her at the head of the house. Mother Theodore apologized for this arrangement to Mother Mary:

It seems a pity, my good Mother, to make this poor Liguori a superior already, but what can be done? . . . O my very dear Mother, do you at least pray for us, for our house, for me in particular, and be kind enough to give me your advice upon the matters mentioned above, but keep with the greatest secrecy whatever concerns the Bishop, for if he knew of my writing all this he would be displeased beyond measure. He is said to be going to France in the spring and without doubt he will go to see you. . . . This good prelate has many vexations. He is not loved by his clergy, and I do not know what the result will be. You understand that this too is for you alone.⁶³

The Bishop had in reality many sorrows. His mother had died in France, and his sister Eugénie was ill at Saint-Servan. He felt the need of someone to lean upon, to assist him and supply for his deficiencies. His favorite expression appearing again and again in his letters is "the poor Bishop of Vincennes."⁶⁴ "When shall I have a coadjutor?" he wrote to Father Martin at Corpus Christi in 1841.⁶⁵ "Does not my poor command of English make it necessary to seek someone to speak for me?" His trials and troubles weighed deeply upon him. "One must accustom oneself to

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ "Le pauvre Evêque de Vincennes."

⁶⁵ S.M.W.A.

being forgotten.”⁶⁶ His affection for his native land was diminishing, and he had asked his brother Joseph to sell his property there. The amount to be realized, if invested here, would enable him to be useful no matter what might be his social position. From the beginning he had been haunted by the desire to resign from the Bishopric of Vincennes. “My situation is insupportable. The Propagation of the Faith is sending a little less than half what was allocated to me last year.”⁶⁷ Next year we may receive nothing at all. The future of the diocese is very sad.”

To this discouraged letter Father Martin replied with an offer to leave Logansport, where he had been pastor for two years, and come to Vincennes to help the Bishop, but the latter hesitated. Had he better renounce the charge and the dignity? One of his chief reasons was “this language which I shall never know.” “Who in France,” he asks mournfully, “would have thought of making me a Bishop?”⁶⁸ In May, 1842, he was still debating as to whether Father Martin had the qualities necessary to be his intimate friend and assistant at Vincennes, but in June he decided to appoint Father Buteux to the pastorate at Logansport and to make Father Martin Vicar General at Vincennes.

The Martin, de la Hailandière, and Le Fer families were old and intimate friends in France. This fact perhaps encouraged Sister Saint Francis Xavier to write freely to his Lordship upon some of the matters in his dealings with the Community which caused her perplexity and trouble of conscience. Of these circumstances she had specified two in her letters to France, their debts and his lack of regard for Mother Theodore. No doubt this latter fact was touched upon in her letter. Was he embarking upon a settled policy of seeking to discredit Mother Theodore with her novices and thus to undermine or destroy her influence in the Community? His letter would admit of this conjecture. He insisted that he had acted in a premeditated manner and that in Europe Sister Saint Francis had been prejudiced against him:

Why must it be that since your arrival in America you are not found to be the same? Why, my daughter, lately did you believe yourself obliged to cause me to read with my own eyes that your confidence in your Bishop is no longer the same as heretofore? What did they want to do at Ruillé in thus lessening your confidence in me? Was it blamable on your part? Or else had I done anything which had rendered me henceforth unworthy of it? For you and for me I answer, No. Therefore there is an enigma here, which I cannot solve. One thing, however, I understand very well; it is this—that it is impossible for much good to be done as I understand it, without some change.

Good daughter, you did not expect this declaration. I wished not to speak to you of these things; I finish by doing so; it is necessary. If in so doing I afflict you, pardon me; my heart will be only so much the more open on this account, the first time we shall see each other; then you will explain all to me, will you not? I thought, my daughter, that I owed you this explanation, on account of your frankness in telling me in your last what you found to blame in my conduct the last time I was at St. Mary's. Later I will tell you, if you wish, the motives of

⁶⁶ A Rev. A. Martin, 17 décembre, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁷ He received in 1842, 68,596.97 fr. (\$13,519), the Vincennes Eudists, 18,620 fr. (\$3,724). In 1841 he received 44,580 fr. (\$8,916), and the Eudists, 20,000 fr. (\$4,000). *Annales de la Prop. de la Foi*.

⁶⁸ A Rev. A. Martin, 9 janvier, 1842. S.M.W.A.

my conduct; for the present it will be enough to assure you that in this circumstance, I acted with calm and for a purpose. I believed I was fulfilling a duty. Thus it has been at other times, and especially in one circumstance where your piety had some difficulty in not condemning my apparent want of charity. In these circumstances I thought I was acting for the best. May it have been so in reality; for there is a way that seems right to men, but which is not so; may God preserve us from walking in it—you and me!

Adieu—pray for your Bishop and friend,

CEL.⁶⁹

If he could have said instead of, "I acted with calm" that he was guided by the advice of the most saintly and learned among his confreres, how eagerly would the harassed Community have treasured this assurance. Such was not the case, however. If Bishop de la Hailandière ever sought counsel from any one after 1840, this does not appear in his correspondence. Like many autocratic characters one of the Bishop's weapons was tergiversation. He acknowledges this: "... fear of forgetting caused me to say some little things which were not true."⁷⁰ Mother Theodore knew it also, and this uncertainty clouding their future must have been painful in the extreme. Most people have experienced at some time in their lives the sorrow of discovering one who has been trusted to be untruthful, but there is probably no greater pain possible. They must have felt like Columbus's terrified mariners, when on the wild waste of the western waters the compass began to desert the faithful North Star. No one by this time probably knew the Bishop better than Mother Theodore. To Bishop Bouvier she wrote in December, 1842:

Monseigneur allows us the liberty of dismissing those of our subjects who are not suitable. . . . I have much to suffer from my superior. He possesses a disposition calculated to make a martyr of its possessor but still more of those who must bear with him. I say nothing further about this, for he is the Bishop. He is moreover so pious, so humble, so zealous for the welfare of religion and in particular of our house that I feel it a duty for us to throw a veil over these faults which he laments before God and which do not belong to the essentials. I must say nevertheless that he is jealous of his authority and wants to do everything himself.⁷¹

Mother Theodore's claim to the complete confidence of the Sisters was based on the absolute integrity with which she followed the Rule in precept and in practice and upon her fidelity in seeking help and direction from her higher superiors. In the serious trend of affairs in 1842, her need of help and advice grew greater from day to day and made her turn with ever increasing insistence to her motherhouse across the seas. Their letters, even their utmost pleading, remained however unanswered, but God was preparing the help which never yet has failed a trusting heart. Their greatest catastrophe, the fire of October 2, eventually proved their salvation in a moral sense, for it led to Mother Theodore's voyage to France. If, as it appears, the French superiors proved equally unable to grapple with the difficult and momentous problems of the American mission, there came to their aid another who could and did so. Speaking with the clear and fatherly voice of the Church, one of the most learned and distinguished

⁶⁹ 12 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁷⁰ 13 juin, 1841. S.M.W.A.

⁷¹ 6 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

prelates in Europe, the kindly and devoted Bishop of Le Mans, John Baptist Bouvier, became their counsellor and protector. His figure looms as a tower of strength and encouragement over all these shadowed years, and but for him the Sisters of Providence today would never be leading the religious life peacefully in the beautiful forest home which God has given them.

Mother Theodore's personal reaction to all this seems already characterized with the magnanimity which marked her relations with everyone, her Sisters, her French superiors, her friends and benefactors everywhere.

You see, my dear Mother, she wrote to Mother Mary, that there are here only crosses and afflictions of every sort. I can truly say however that personal griefs touch me only slightly—My heart is no longer sensitive, and all it has suffered seems to have sheathed it in a cuirass which renders it insensible to every shaft.⁷²

That Father Buteux had injured her in the esteem of the Community, she did not deny:

I must also add to my difficulties the fine portrait that good Father Buteux made of me and all the other miseries he heaped upon me with the best intentions in the world. He did it because he knew me better than anyone else and how incapable I seemed to him of performing the sublime functions that devolved upon me, especially that of foundress of missionary Sisters. He thought such a person ought to be a saint. Was he wrong?⁷³

Her greatest anxiety and her heaviest care was her obligation to teach the way of virtue to the Community, inculcating it daily both by word and example upon the young persons who had gathered about her, filled with good will, it is true, but sprung from a young and independent nation noted for its resistance to authority.

Nothing is more odious in America than the office of superior, for from it flow dependence and submission, virtues which the Americans do not recognize.

To bear the name of superior in the United States of America is to acquire the inalienable right to the public hatred, contempt, and so forth. This prevailing attitude is due to the republican education given to the children. All our postulants have it on coming to us. . . .

I can assure you it gives me a terrible fear to take upon myself alone the responsibility of a nascent community and that in this country. It is truly fearful. Pray much for me, my good Mother, I have great need, I am as dry and arid as Gelboe, always occupied about others, always in a hurry. . . . The only thing that is the least reassuring is that I feel within myself the disposition to refuse nothing to God, to give Him everything He asks of me, to sacrifice above all the yearning I have always had to love and to be loved, of wanting someone to whom I can open my heart and who will understand it. Herein, I think, lies comfort one does not realize until one is deprived of it. How many times I have thought of what our good Mother Mary said: "Theodore is always looking for love."⁷⁴

Friends and relatives in France continued to be mindful of them, however, and the Bishop blessed during his visit of November, 1842, the sacred vessels for the altar sent by M. Léon Dupont and other friends in Tours, France.

⁷² A Mère Marie, 15 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁷³ A Mère Saint Charles, 24 août, 1842. S.M.W.A.

⁷⁴ A Mère Marie, 15 décembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

St. Martin's eve our Bishop consecrated the beautiful ostensorium, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, and the first grace I asked Jesus residing in this new dwelling which you have prepared for Him, was for the inhabitants of Tours. Yes, for all our good friends in France, who by their prayers and their alms aid this dear mission of Indiana. I have asked for you, through the intercession of St. Martin, a great love for God's will, that you may say with Him, "I refuse neither life nor death," etc., but I above all have asked that you may obtain a sincere devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist.⁷⁵

Shortly before Father Corbe's arrival at Saint Mary's, the jubilee had been preached with great benefit to the people of the vicinity, Father Lalumiere speaking once a day. This one great happiness and benefit had been hovering over their heads all during these months of anxiety, and since July it had become a certainty, the appointment of their chaplain, Father Corbe. Since Father Buteux's removal they had had young Father Anthony Parret for temporary confessor and chaplain. Father Corbe, at that time director of the Vincennes Seminary, had been in the Bishop's mind as the most capable person for the post for some time. Father Corbe himself was willing even desirous of the change. Thirty-six years of age, devout, discreet, retiring, scholarly, and of studious habits, Father Corbe was suited in an eminent manner to the duties which devolved upon him for thirty years as chaplain of the motherhouse. His kindly, sincere, and loyal character endeared him to the Sisters, and his uprightness and prudence made him a tried and trusted counselor in times of great difficulty.

"Notre père," as Mother Theodore always called him, accommodated himself gradually to the quiet life at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. He had decidedly artistic tastes, drew and painted with considerable success, and had been professor of drawing and painting at the Seminary at Vincennes. He had a marked predilection for scientific pursuits, and as a botanist he was especially successful. On many a geologizing tour in the environs of Saint Mary's he was accompanied by his lifelong friend and compatriot, Father Martin, Vicar General at Vincennes and later Bishop of Natchitoches. One of Father Corbe's later hobbies was photography after the experiments and success of Daguerre became known in America in the late 1840's. He possessed some highly valued pictures which at his death he left to the Community.

A faithful, devoted, loyal priest he was much loved by his brothers in the sacred ministry, and Bishop de la Hailandière at one time considered him his best friend. Born in Brittany in 1806, he made his studies at the diocesan seminary of Rennes and came to America with Bishop Bruté in 1836. His first mission was Saint Francisville, Illinois, on the Embarras River, twelve miles south of Vincennes then called Rivière au Chat or Cat River. Corbeville was a temporary name for the settlement. His church there was built during his incumbency and dedicated to his patron Saint John. Bishop Bruté was devotedly attached to the pious kindly young priest and often visited him on his lonely mission. It was Father Corbe who related the well known incident of the Bishop's despoiling himself of the

⁷⁵ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 223.

coverings when they slept before the fire at night.⁷⁶ He had the privilege of being near the Bishop in his last days, and was one of the four priests who were present at his saintly death. Father Bessonies tells a characteristic story of young Father Corbe.⁷⁷ One day when Bishop de la Hailandière's newly arrived group of missionaries came to visit him, he pointed out the persimmon tree near his little frame church and invited them to climb aloft and get their dinner. After Father Corbe's transfer to Vincennes he acted as president of the seminary. On November 23, 1842, he arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and Father Parret was transferred to Washington, Indiana, which he left a year later to enter the Jesuit order to die some years afterward in the South. The terrible climate of Louisiana proved deadly to the Indiana priests who left the Vincennes diocese to go there. Bishop Martin seems a notable exception.

The tragic year ended with a sweet and peaceful Christmas. This year they had High Mass sung by the new chaplain, "the first," said Mother Theodore, "which has been sung in our forest. At ten A.M. another was celebrated for the people, who were charmed with the praises of God, sung by our Sisters. The service was very touching."⁷⁸ On December 28, feast of Saint Theodore, the children of the *pensionnat* were entertained at dinner at Providence by the Sisters in honor of the day. Christmas vacations, owing to frontier conditions and difficulty of transportation, were not so general as they have since become. To the French people Christmas has always been predominantly a spiritual celebration, but as far as their poverty would permit, the Sisters spared nothing to make the holidays pleasant for their pupils. Saint Theodore's day then and later was a gala occasion. French and American culinary skill blended in the dinner at which Mother Theodore entertained the pupils. After its gaiety and laughter had died away, Miss Matilda Richardson presented the good wishes of the young guests, couched in the favorite tetrameter couplets, still preserved in which Sister Mary Celestia had no doubt assisted her:

FOR MOTHER ST. THEODORE'S FEAST DAY

Would that this happy festive day,
 Were in the blooming month of May,
 Then Nature's sweetest flowers we'd gather,
 To crown thy placid brow, sweet Mother.
 But each blossom is cleft, each bud is riven
 By the cold and wintry blasts of heaven.
 Yet our hearts contain a garden green.
 Where roses bud and bloom unseen,
 Within them stands affection's bower,
 From whence we seldom cull a flower,
 But we will take from thence a spray
 For thee on this thy festive day.
 This wreath is tied with ribband blue,
 The symbol of affection true.
 No hidden thorn in it you'll find
 To pain the brow 'tis meant to bind.

⁷⁶ Alerding, *History of the Vincennes Diocese*, pp. 153, 154.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

⁷⁸ Community Diary.

'Tis all as harmless as 'tis rare.
Oh! then the little emblem wear
Not round thy brow, no, round thy heart,
And may it to thy soul impart
From grateful love one filial ray
For thee on this thy festive day.

MATILDA

December, 1842⁷⁹

⁷⁹ S.M.W.A.

CHAPTER XI

THE JOURNEY TO FRANCE FOR AID—I

PREPARATIONS AND PRELIMINARIES

"This long voyage in my poor health . . . I would consider a very tender mark of God's Providence."

MOTHER THEODORE

THE news of the fire at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, when it became known in France, filled the hearts of the little Community's friends and well-wishers with consternation. "If the Bishop of Vincennes does not come to your assistance, how will you be able to repair the consequences of the disaster of which you are the victims?" wrote Bishop Bouvier. "How will you provide food, and how maintain yourselves? Now is the time to cast yourselves into the arms of Providence." Then with his customary practical helpfulness, he added, "This heavenly Father, whose beloved daughters you are, sends you a thousand francs through me." Their other friends were equally generous. Mme. Parmentier, who was unable to do anything for them herself because of the unsatisfactory state of her affairs, secured sixty dollars from her former teachers in Brussels, the Dames de Berlaimont. M. de la Bertaudière, Mother Theodore's old friend at Soulaines, sent five hundred francs and a letter filled with wise and encouraging counsels. Later through Bishop Bouvier he sent a second sum of three thousand francs.¹ A thousand francs was all that Mother Mary felt she could give at the time, as the Ruillé Community had been obliged to incur some debt for the erection of a substantial addition to the motherhouse, a section of the building still standing to the right of the early pillared chapel entrance and extending to the brook. The sum from Ruillé was received with utmost gratitude and was just in time, as the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was on the verge of destitution. In her letter to Ruillé, Mother Theodore mentioned that Mr. Byerley had given them a hundred dollars, but that was all gone, and the two hundred from Ruillé kept the wolf from the door for the remainder of the severe winter.

The different sorts of food used on the frontier could fortunately be procured at a very low price, and now thanks to the generosity of their friends, they could pay the requisite cash, without which they could get nothing. For themselves all during these years of penury, cornbread and pork were their daily ration, but for their pupils they tried, when they could, to provide wheat bread and a somewhat better menu.

The money that you have sent comes like a gift from Divine Providence whose children doubly we are, wrote Mother Theodore to Mother Mary. We were just at the end of what had been sent by Mr. Byerley; our provisions were exhausted, and we were asking ourselves where in another fifteen days we should get bread.

¹ Sister Mary Theodosia Mug, *Life and Lifework of Mother Theodore Guérin* (New York, Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1904), p. 252.

Your donation, then, is received as a gift from heaven of which we shall avail ourselves, for here commodities are at a very low price as I have already told you. You see now, dear Mother, your sacrifice will be very useful to us, as without your generosity I do not know what would have become of us. This is a truth, for we are, indeed, very poor. But, Mother, I tell you with some shame, for I feel it is imperfect, that a hundred times more do I love your good letter than the money. That is Theodore again, you will say, always running after affection. Yes, Mother, after yours. It will always be my happiness; and to think that somehow I have lost it will always be my most bitter grief. But why do I tell you these things? You know well your poor daughter of the Woods.²

The winter was one of great hardship, the severest in many years, and the sharp winds and snowstorms continued as late as April. The biting cold had set in early in November, and at intervals merciless blizzards swept the western country during which travelers were often frozen to death. The Sisters had their noses and fingers frozen, and their hands adhered to the icy locks of the convent doors.

The cold freezes us to the bones, wrote Mother Theodore in February, 1843. My nose and fingers are frozen. We ought to be accustomed to it, as for almost four months the ground has been icy and more or less deeply covered with snow. That circumstance however would never give you an idea of the severity of this winter weather. In France it snows and freezes, but the cold is nothing compared to that of our forests, nor the latter in comparison with the icy temperature of the plains, wide and immense as oceans. Recently a traveler was overtaken on a prairie only a few miles from our home by one of those blizzards, which last but a short time, it is true, but which freeze the blood to the very heart. The unfortunate man had two horses and a cart. To escape death he killed one of the beasts and took refuge in the warm body. Soon forced to leave his retreat, he killed the second horse, and several days later was discovered a solid block of ice with the body of the horse into which he had thrust himself. . . .³

Hail, such as often falls in America, seems to have been completely unknown to the French Sisters:

During these terrible periods of cold, showers sometimes fall of a singular sort like liquid peas in torrents. Woe to the traveler surprised far from human habitations or unable to find shelter. Soon a thick layer of ice covers him and so greatly impedes the movement of his limbs that he is forced to stop, then falls asleep and dies. At Vincennes, of five men who had gone out in one of these blizzards, three were fortunate enough to find shelter in houses near at hand. The other two, farther away, were found still breathing after the storm, but they both died, I believe, a little later.⁴

During these violent storms no attempt was made on the frontier to give shelter to domestic animals, which stood meekly out in the weather to survive or perish as they could.

The other day I observed the effects of this singular rain on one of our poor cows, which was standing outside the door of my room when the storm began. The poor beast sought shelter in a little shack and leaned perfectly motionless against the planks. In an instant she was encased in a kind of shell like a tortoise, or rather like a caparison of thick crystal, which grew heavier from moment to moment so that the poor animal was overwhelmed. As soon as the storm was over, I tried to help

² 24 février, 1843. S.M.W.A.

³ A Mère Saint Charles, 25 février, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁴ *Ibid.*

the poor cow to rid itself of its burden. I could hardly make an opening in this cuirass of ice and would not have succeeded but for the warmth of its body.⁵

During this winter period the Sisters had the experience, unique to them, of traveling to Terre Haute in a sleigh upon the frozen surface of the snow.

This rain congeals the snow to the hardness of marble, and one travels in sleighs upon its smooth surface. In this fashion I made the trip to Terre Haute last week. We went like the wind, but it is very cold, I assure you, and the air is so rarefied that breathing is difficult. To crown our misery, all three of the chimneys of our cabin smoke . . . and day and night we must have a door or window open, which freezes the marrow of our bones. Since winter began we are exhausted, and we have toothaches and other miseries.⁶

At last the merciless cold abated, and early in April the ice was melted on the rivers, and again the hoarse boom of the steamboat whistle on the Wabash reechoed through the woods.

At the opening of Lent the first regular Forty Hours Devotion was held at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, the very first to be established in the United States.⁷ The little group of Sisters in the forest of Vigo County were far from realizing at the time that this unique Eucharistic honor was theirs. They were quick however to introduce and perpetuate practices of devotion customary in French convents, and thus they stand in the forefront of Eucharistic adorers in America. The Forty Hours exposition of the Blessed Sacrament arose in Milan in the first half of the sixteenth century to beg Divine protection against the Turks. Toward the end of the century Pope Paul III established it in Rome to rotate from church to church as a continuous public prayer for the needs of the time. During the succeeding centuries it spread all over Europe and gradually became identified in a spirit of reparation with the carnival time.

This period, the three days preceding Ash Wednesday, was fixed by Bishop de la Hailandière when he granted the permission in perpetuity to the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The Bishop was convinced that despite the poverty of the Sisters, the reverence and solemnity befitting this adorable Sacrament would be observed as the Canons require. This permission had been asked and obtained the previous year, but they were unable to take advantage of it then. Now at their first opportunity they gladly did so. On the first Sunday of Lent, March 1, and the two following days the Blessed Sacrament was exposed all day, with Benediction each evening in the little convent chapel. For these three blessed days all other occupations were put aside to permit the Sisters and the novices to gather at the foot of the Tabernacle. The Catholic pupils and the people for miles around came also to avail themselves of this unprecedented spiritual privilege. The Forty Hours Exposition has continued to be held from year to year, and Lent at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods still opens with this time-honored Eucharistic devotion as a prelude. Not till ten years later, in 1853, did Bishop John N. Neumann introduce the Forty Hours Devotion into the diocese of Philadelphia after what he felt to be a

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ecclesiastical Review*, vol. 82, June, 1930, p. 576.

direct verbal command from our Lord. In 1858 Archbishop Francis P. Kenrick introduced it into the Baltimore Archdiocese. But during all the intervening years Mother Theodore and her Sisters in their far away woodland convent made it possible for the Catholics of that rural community to assist at the Forty Hours Devotion owing to the fact that at that time the Sisters' little chapel was the only place for divine service for the countryside. Only in 1866, twenty-three years after its inauguration in the Indiana forests, was the devotion formally approved for all the dioceses of the United States at the Plenary Council of Baltimore.⁸

During all this time Mother Theodore's project of a voyage to France was maturing in her mind. That she had been thinking of it for months is proved from her correspondence. As early as the previous August she had written to her friends in New York of a possible voyage and even before that time to M. de la Bertaudière, who reminded her in one of his letters of her wish to come to surprise them at Soulaines with her half-Indian novice. At this date it was mainly for counsel in her trials and perplexities that she wished to go, and the passing months rendered the need of it more and more imperative. Now however, that the acute necessity for money was an added motive, the plan began to take definite shape in her thoughts.

Correspondence with the motherhouse was very unsatisfactory, and one of the greatest crosses of the Sisters in America was the silence of the French Superiors. On December 6, 1842, Mother Theodore wrote: "It is a year since our good Mother Mary has written to me or to any of us." Replies were not prompt and were delayed by untoward circumstances. The letter of response to Mother Theodore's report of the disaster of October 2 was not written until November 28. It was sent to Bishop Bouvier, who did not forward it until four days later. Then, since Mother Mary had omitted to place "Indiana" on the address, it had been missent to Sainte Marie, Illinois, and, according to Mother Theodore's record, did not arrive at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods until February 4. The joy with which it was received reveals the depth of loneliness into which their isolation had plunged the affectionate hearts at Saint Mary's. Disregarding for once "these cold Americans" they gave free rein to their feelings:

MY MOST HONORED AND DEAR MOTHER,

How much good your letter of November 28 did me. It made us wild with joy. We cried, we laughed, we embraced each other—in fine, we were beside ourselves. Our good Mother is always the same. Here is her great heart. I do not know what the Sisters said to me. I did not say anything; my heart was too full of joy and happiness for me to speak. O dear Mother, the Lord will repay you for the good you have done to me by this letter, full of those sentiments it expresses so well and which have so quickly found the way to a heart in which our good God has put so much love for my most dear Mother Mary.⁹

Delays like this were hard to bear when matters of serious import were at stake. Now when the very existence of the Community hung in the balance, Mother Theodore felt that the only way she could secure the

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 60, January, 1919, p. 15.

⁹ 24 février, 1843. S.M.W.A.

advice of which she stood in such dire need was by personal discussion of her trials and difficulties with the superiors in France, even at the cost of the long voyage. Though the subject had been under discussion for several weeks, her letter of April 8, 1843, prefaced by details on their financial position, contains the first open reference by Mother Theodore to this project. Their creditors were now less importunate than before the fire in October, but they still required high interest on their money. The ten pupils at the *pensionnat* paid nothing, although as their parents, though poor, were honest, their tuition could in all probability be collected later on. The Sisters were requested in all the principal cities of Indiana, but the two years of novitiate had to be completed before they could be sent out. Mother Theodore felt this to be essential, especially for the American novices.

I do not yet know, dear Mother, what is going to become of us. The fury of our enemies seems to have died down, and since the event of October [the fire], they have not gone to extremes. Those to whom we owe money torment us less, but they require high interest. There are ten boarders at the Academy who pay nothing at all now but will pay later on. The number of postulants is decreasing. . . . On the other hand, our Sisters are asked for, as I have already told you, in all the principal cities of Indiana. We are willing to give only those who have spent two years in the novitiate. This precaution seems necessary because the Americans are naturally so inconstant. If they persevere in the good dispositions which they manifest now, they will be good religious and will render great service to the Church. One thing, however, is wanting—that miserable money. If we could meet the first expenses of the institution and pay our debts, it is more than probable that we could succeed. But now, what are we to do?¹⁰

The only answer to this question was to go abroad for aid. The Bishop had informed them that he could not provide for the expenses of their house for the coming year nor, despite his earlier promises, could he pay their debts. To him also the idea of a journey to France had occurred: "Then he told me that he thought of sending me to France to make an appeal to our friends and to other beneficent souls in favor of an establishment which promises so much and which cannot support itself."¹¹

The Bishop, who had often urged Mother Theodore to apply to her friends in France for aid, now began to give the matter serious consideration. To Mother Theodore he had not referred to it for some time, although he had spoken of it to their chaplain, Father Corbe. In Monseigneur's estimation two obstacles stood in the way of the voyage: the difficulty of replacing Mother Theodore at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and the risk involved in her undertaking so long a journey in her precarious state of health. Despite her conviction of the immense advantage which would accrue to the Community if she could talk her difficulties over with her superiors in France and with the kind and erudite Bishop Bouvier, Mother Theodore committed the issue to Divine Providence and for some time said nothing either for or against the project. The matter had not left the Bishop's mind, however, and on March 22, 1843, she received his ideas pro and con, in detail, and in writing as was his custom:

¹⁰ A Mère Marie, 8 avril, 1843. S.M.W.A.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

PROJECT OF A VOYAGE TO FRANCE

Reasons for: The hope, more or less founded, of receiving money to aid the community; perhaps one or two good musicians might be brought as novices; perhaps some resources for the future might be procured from friends; possibility of doing away, if willing, with the unfavorable impression of the rising community, produced by so many reports, exaggerated or false, which have been made.

Reasons against: Ill health, which will suffer from the voyage, the bad state of which may prevent the return to America; piety, which the dissipation of a journey will not increase; the spiritual good of the community, which will suffer from the absence; failure of the begging tour for reasons easily seen; expenses of the voyage. Would it be better to pay one's debts?

Trouble and perplexities concerning the voyage: To go alone is not possible; two going, double difficulty, for the money, for the person who should accompany. Confidences at Ruillé (singular ones if I judge by your last letter) easily obtained and which will be profited by adroitly, no one being there to contradict. Probable efforts by motherhouse to advise, regulate, direct everything here, directly or indirectly, to which I can no longer consent.

MY GOOD MOTHER:

I have just placed before you the reasons for and against your voyage, such as they have presented themselves to my mind. I will take care not to decide anything; the question is not so easy. Its solution would present to me, on account of particular circumstances, difficulties which I have no desire at all to face. I leave all to you to decide in this case, as you see best. I shall not oppose anything you may decide upon. I beg of Our Lord to enlighten and strengthen you. I have the honor to be, with respectful affection, my good Mother,

Your humble Servant,

✠ CEL. Bp. of Vinc.

VINC. 22 March, 1843.¹²

The Bishop therefore was in a state of indecision, but the Community had already been consulted, and on April 1 the Particular Council had met to discuss the advisability of the trip. They decided again to leave the matter to the Bishop, but they were all convinced that the voyage was necessary to the very existence of the struggling Community. That Mother Theodore was ready to undertake even a much longer and more dangerous journey was beyond doubt.

After much prayer to know the Will of God, Mother Theodore voiced the wishes of the Council when she asked the Bishop to allow her to go. He approved the plan when he was written to, and as Mother Theodore was much averse to the Bishop's original idea of sending her alone, Sister Mary Cecilia, who by this time had been a year and a half in the novitiate, was selected as her companion. The Foundress's grateful heart, which overflowed at the least mark of kindness from her superiors in France, also considered the possibility of the trip as a special blessing from God. She wrote to France:

I would consider it a very tender mark of God's providence if it were given me to see you again, for, dear Mother, your opinion would be not only useful now but is very necessary. This foundation belongs to you, to you I say, who have watched over it amid the countless troubles it has caused you, to undertake this work of God. I feel, dear Mother, that you have the grace and experience for laying the

¹² S.M.W.A.



Drawn in India Ink by Sister Georgiana from Sister Maurice's Pencil Sketch

THE FIRST CHURCH BUILT IN THE WOODS OF VIGO COUNTY IN 1837
 Brother Joseph taught the children of the pioneers
 there on week days.



Drawn by Sister Georgiana from Sister Maurice's Pencil Sketch

SOUTH VIEW OF THE THRALLS HOUSE AND LOG CHAPEL IN 1840
 WITH AUNT SALLIE THRALLS AND TWO CHILDREN

The little Madonna with
outstretched merciful
hands has smiled upon the
woodland convent for over
a hundred years.



BERTAUDIÈRE'S
MADONNA
OF 1841



Drawn by Sister Georgiana from Sister Maurice's Pencil Sketch
Rear of the Village Church of 1844 and the Pioneer Cemetery with
the Graves of Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Seraphine
near the Chancel.

foundation stone of the edifice we would like to rear in this country, and I could not but consider it a great favor from heaven to be able to have your direction, or at least your counsels in the matter.

It is almost impossible to tell you everything by letter at so great a distance. Before acting, one would have to understand well these people whose customs are so different. With what confidence and gratitude I would gather up your words, O my good Mother. I believe one learns to appreciate her Mother more and more when one is so far away from her. Dear Mother, I may tell you also the happiness I shall have in seeing you once more. Oh, it is too good for one who no longer ought to have happiness here below. To dwell on the thought of such a delightful interview is a great immortification in me, and often I am obliged to dismiss the thought, but to procure such a joy I would fear neither the fatigues nor the perils of such a long and dangerous journey. But I feel, too, that having made to God the sacrifice of all this when I came to this desert, I can no longer desire such consolation without taking back something of what I have given. Further, my dear Mother, I do not even desire to see you. I wish only the holy Will of God and its entire accomplishment.¹³

Every aspect of the matter was the subject of earnest prayer and study. As they were to leave in a few weeks, many details demanded attention. Accompanied by Sister Basilide, Mother Theodore made a hurried trip to Vincennes to consult the Bishop, and, if possible, to see her Sisters at Jasper and Saint Francisville. The latter mission she was able to visit owing to its proximity, and she sent word to the Jasper Sisters to meet her at Vincennes. The news of her intended departure had now become known outside the Community, and Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer had already learned of it at Jasper to her intense surprise from a chance encounter in the village. Owing to the continuous rain and to their difficulty in securing a closed conveyance however, the Jasper Sisters could not reach Vincennes to see their Mother before she left. As they had not returned to the motherhouse for the retreat in August, she had not seen them for a year. One of her affectionate and motherly letters endeavored to console them and her for the disappointment.

The Bishop took all the preparations and arrangements for the voyage into his own hands, and at their urgent solicitation he abandoned his intention to send Mother Theodore alone. She had several reasons for wishing to have Sister Mary Cecilia as her companion; one of them was her desire to give this talented young Sister the advantage of spending some time in the regular and fervent novitiate at Ruillé. The voyage would be an education in itself, and the Bishop even suggested that she take vocal and instrumental lessons in Paris. Only on April 12, however, did he finally give permission for Mother Theodore to go, and the first of May was to be the date of their departure.

TO MOTHER MARY, *Superior General of the Sisters of Providence*,
Ruillé-sur-Loir.

Vincennes, Wednesday of Holy Week, April 12, 1843.

MY VERY DEAR MOTHER,

At last, very dear Mother, it was decided an hour ago that I must leave for France and that I am to start in a few days.

I have had no part in the decision, the Bishop having taken everything here into his own hands; however, it was only after we had written him a letter about two

¹³ A Mère Marie, 8 avril, 1843. S.M.W.A.

weeks ago asking to go. We wrote it after much prayer to know the Will of God. We all think that this voyage is necessary to our nascent congregation. I fear you may think it a rash undertaking, but, dear Mother, do not condemn us without a hearing. I feel sure that when you have heard our reasons you will not blame us. Today I shall say very little, though my heart is full. I am going to leave in the forest these poor children, these poor Sisters, who at the moment I am writing to you are far from suspecting what threatens them, for I am at Vincennes where I came with Sister Basilide to visit the establishments of Jasper and Saint Francisville, then to make a little retreat during the last days of Holy Week. The Sisters from Jasper are coming here perhaps this evening to see us, and we have come from Saint Francisville.

On arriving we found that the Bishop had made all the preparations, all the arrangements for this trip. It seems that he is going to send me alone, for he has no money; I am hopeful however that he will give me a companion, as I can find what would be necessary for the passage at New York. It would be an American Sister, one of your daughters of the forest, who would go in the name of all her Sisters that have come and of those yet to come, to put herself under your protection, or, rather, to beg that you would adopt them for your children. I would take her also that she might be formed somewhat to the religious life in our novitiate, in order to be better qualified to render service to our little house of the woods.

Everybody says that I shall never reach France. I do not know. I am not very strong. The past winter has singularly weakened me. If it is the Will of God, who has directed all things for this journey, however, I have confidence that He will sustain my feeble life as well on the waves as on the bed of suffering, where He snatched me from the arms of death almost ready to embrace me. Moreover, perhaps my term is finished and my task completed. We will see in all and through all the Will of God accomplished.

I had almost resolved to say nothing of the happiness I shall have in seeing you again, but I cannot deny myself. Oh, yes, dear Mother Mary, again I shall see you! I am confident. Could I die without having received your blessing, without—but no! this is enough. O Mother, in reading these lines your heart is touched. It goes out to your poor daughter. With what love you will embrace her! And you, dear Mother Saint Charles, I shall see you, also my beloved Sister Eudoxie, Sister Saint Vincent, in a word all of you whom I so tenderly love. *Mon Dieu!*

I think that I shall leave the first of May, the first day of the month of Mary! I ought to reach New York the fifteenth, or about that time; so, God helping, we shall arrive at Havre towards the end of June or earlier. We shall have been a long time on the sea when you read this. Pray for us, my good Mother. We, or rather, I, have great need of it.

If misfortune awaits us, and this should be the last letter you receive from me, I wish it to tell you that in death as in life I am always, in Jesus, our Divine Saviour,

Your obedient daughter,

SISTER SAINT THEODORE.¹⁴

From a human viewpoint one would almost wonder that she could have the courage to go. Dire poverty and administrative difficulties were encompassing the Community. Her voyage might lengthen into many months. Yet, go she must. In another five years like the past year and a half their beloved mission on the chosen soil of Indiana, for the permanence of which they would all have willingly given their life's blood, must have perished. No time however could now be lost. She returned to Saint

¹⁴ S.M.W.A.

Mary's to make preparations for her departure and to provide for the administration of the affairs of the Community in her absence. Having failed in her plan to secure Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer as superior owing to Father Kundek's reluctance to allow her to leave Jasper, Mother Theodore had only Sister Basilide and Sister Saint Francis Xavier to place in charge. Neither of these two Sisters seemed equipped by age or experience for so responsible a post. Sister Basilide was thirty-one years of age, had been some fifteen years in the Community, and had made her final profession the previous summer. She had also the advantage of having been trained at the cradle of the order at Ruillé-sur-Loir. She was however fully occupied as *première maîtresse* at the academy where she was loved and successful, and where all her time was spent. She was devoted and energetic, intelligent and resourceful, but these qualities were not equaled by her discretion, and her judgment was often clouded by her feelings. Mother Theodore therefore gave to her only the duties of econome, and turned from her to choose as superior the twenty-seven-year-old religious, hardly four years in the Community and professed but two years previously, Sister Saint Francis Xavier.

Years do not always connote wisdom, however, and in the frontier period many young religious were of necessity found in positions of authority. Mother Theodore with her unerring sagacity in reading souls knew that to the complete uprightness, the singularly correct judgment, the zeal and devotedness and unalterable loyalty of this young Sister she could unhesitatingly confide her dearest treasure, the happiness and welfare of her Sisters. In Sister Saint Francis, Mother Theodore knew in whom she trusted, and in the moral storm which broke over the little Community during her long absence, Sister Saint Francis Xavier proved beyond a doubt the rectitude of the judgment which had placed the helm in her frail hands. Mother Theodore's words of her, written months earlier, seem in this respect almost prophetic, "I think that this child would struggle alone and unaided against all the powers of hell to destroy us." Mother Theodore felt that she could count too upon Sister Saint Francis Xavier's charming personality and her inventive self-forgetfulness to make the novices happy amid their privations, an expectation in which their perspicacious Mother was never disappointed. Some years later Sister Saint Francis wrote to one of her sisters in France: "We often have gay recreations. I am like an old cat playing with her kittens. Pepa [her elder sister] predicted that in punishment for my dislike of dancing, God would send me when fifty years old a passion for this amusement. If she saw me at thirty-four playing *biribi*,¹⁵ she would say: 'Well, the first part of my prediction is accomplished.' "

True, Sister Saint Francis Xavier could command at need the counsels and the learning of their devoted chaplain, Father Corbe, but he had been only five months at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and was not yet acquainted with all the Sisters. Many and bitter trials bravely borne, however, had transformed Irma. That she was not crushed by her new and heavy re-

¹⁵ A game of chance played with seventy numbered tickets. (*Larousse pour Tous*, vol. 1, p. 189). The name was also applied to the game known as "musical chair."

sponsibility is seen from her own beautiful words written a few weeks later:

Oh, yes, Him I may love as much as I can, and never will I love Him as much as His goodness deserves. He it is now who is everything for us, and never has He shown Himself so visibly our Father as since Sister Theodore's departure. I do not know why souls have not more confidence in God when it is He Himself who places them in difficult positions. I have no reason to blame them however, for when I learned that Sister Theodore's voyage was decided upon, my whole being seemed crushed. The most sinister presentiments crowded into my imagination. I seemed to be surrounded by so many misfortunes that death would have been too great a happiness. My Mother, I recognized my incapacity, but I had forgotten what you have told me so many times, that God often finds His glory in making use of the most miserable instruments. Then, too, was not our good and powerful Jesus to remain with us? Those words of our Office, *Deus in medio ejus non commovebitur*, have reassured me as to the destiny of our house. I have no need to tell you that Jesus is by His presence our strength and our conservation. You know better than I, my good Mother, what God is, what He is able to do, and what He does for those who put all their confidence in Him.

I have greatly regretted my thoughts of fear and mistrust concerning Sister Theodore's absence. It is all for the greater glory of God that this voyage had to be undertaken since it is for the good of our community and not only for its good but for its very existence. This journey, for which we have offered so many Communions, so many prayers, oh, I hope the good God will bless it! You will see for yourself that it was absolutely necessary, but its necessity does not diminish the pain which it imposes upon us. There are terrible *musts* in this life. When I consider however that it was becoming morally impossible for us to remain longer in this mission, that we would have had to abandon it—then there is no privation which I would not find light that by this sacrifice our work might be solidified.

My poor Mother, of all my sorrows the greatest would be to return to France, to see again my family and especially my dear superiors at Ruillé. When the good God has given to a soul the grace to leave everything to follow Him, is it possible to return too much gratitude for this favor? My Mother, my good Mother, I have offended God so much in heart that I would wish never again to have any human joy, and where can I find elsewhere this utter privation of the heart if not in the forests of Indiana? Oh, no, I will never leave them. God, who is all powerful, will help us by means of our brothers in France and will fortify us by the counsels of our superiors. We can then make God known and perhaps make Him loved.—Alas, how small to us must be a few earthly consolations; I am going to try once more to belong entirely to Jesus. He is so good! No longer do I wish to tell Him that I love Him, but I wish to try to become humble to prove it to Him. I have so many occasions and so many subjects of humiliation. I am so incapable for exterior things, so corrupt within, so weak in body, so agitated by nerves, so tormented by mosquitoes. My Mother, add to all that, so proud of virtues which I do not possess. Oh, my pride is the nadir of my miseries, but it still does not equal the abyss of the mercy of God. In the Heart of our good Saviour Jesus, I am forever

Your very poor, very weak, but always
obedient and devoted daughter Xavier.

Saint John the Baptist, June 24, 1843.

I communicated this morning for our worthy Bishop Bouvier's intentions, and all our Sisters prayed for him. I feel sure that he prays for us, who have so great a need of help. All our Sisters offer their respect and esteem. Monseigneur de la Hailandière is expected this evening. Pray to God for your poor daughters. I

think exactly as Sister Theodore does. Thus I will consider your advice as the rule of my conduct.¹⁶

Finally on April 26, the two travelers left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The Wabash was now booming, full of water, and out of its banks in many places, but three or four steamboats daily at the Terre Haute wharf at the foot of Walnut Street were announced in the papers. The Sisters expected to reach New York in mid-May and sailing on an American ship, the *Sylvia*, disembark at Havre toward the end of June or earlier. The Reverend John B. Chassé, of Saint Gabriel's College, Vincennes, was crossing to France on the same boat to solicit additional funds for the diocese from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. Mother Theodore took with her ample letters of recommendation from the Bishop of Vincennes, authorizing her to use his name, and experienced as he was in soliciting aid, giving details of great practical utility. In these letters the Bishop described his poverty and inability to provide any longer for the establishment at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, facts which, if acted upon, would necessarily inaugurate a new regime by which the Sisters would endeavor henceforth to provide for themselves. He had encouraged Mother Theodore by the promise that if she brought back ten thousand francs to finish the academy building, he would give to the Sisters the deeds for the site of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, which though the Community had occupied it for three years and the Picquet family had paid the thirty thousand francs promised for its purchase, was still the property of the diocese.

The Bishop had also given to Mother Theodore a list of interested persons in France, his friends and colleagues in the episcopacy, and mentioned the cities she should visit: Rennes, Vitré, Fougères, Saint-Servan, Saint-Malo, Lamballe, Saint-Brieuc, Hennebou near Auray, and Vannes, all in Brittany, also Coutances, Metz, Tours, Nantes, Versailles, and Paris. He asked her to do her utmost to remove the unfavorable impression of his administration current at Rennes and Le Mans, and to explain the immense needs of his diocese.

They will frequently say, "But your Bishop, why, he receives immense sums." Answer, First: It is not true; these last two years he has received much less than many other Bishops, even than religious bodies, neither having one-fourth of his needs. Second: Make them understand what it is to have more than a hundred persons who depend on the Bishop mostly for their sustenance; to build so many churches at a time, furnish them with altars, vestments, etc., etc.; to build houses for the priests; what it is to erect colleges, to form religious establishments, schools, (Your school alone at this moment, I believe, has cost me over \$21,000); our schools at Vincennes; the Brothers of M. Sorin, etc. Let them compare our needs with our receipts, and both with the needs of a diocese in France and its receipts, and they will begin to understand that, notwithstanding what they give us, we must yet be poor and very poor.¹⁷

The Bishop advised Mother Theodore to take as her main objective the awakening of interest in her house among the faithful in France; prayers were to be asked everywhere from the devout, novices sought who would be suitable for the Indiana mission, and funds requested to supply

¹⁶ A Mère Marie, 24 juin, 1843. S.M.W.A.

¹⁷ S.M.W.A.

their urgent need. "I think there is not an institution in the United States," wrote Bishop de la Hailandière, "which has developed so rapidly as Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. . . . Must you now abandon a work which Almighty God has blessed in so special a manner?"¹⁸ The Bishop's letter of recommendation was all that Mother Theodore could desire. Fully and freely he approved of her voyage:

I have weighed before God your reasons for undertaking a voyage to France. I approve of this voyage. I hope that God grants you success and that He will vouchsafe to bring you back to your daughters rich in alms which will have been bestowed upon you. Go, my dear Sister, to that France so charitable, so zealous for our poor missions, and whose resources seem to increase in proportion as she gives.¹⁹

This letter, later reinforced by an autograph recommendation on the same page by Bishop Bouvier, constituted Mother Theodore's credentials to the Bishops, the clergy, and the pious faithful of her native land. Despite her inexperience in this type of work, her frail health, and the inauspicious summer time of her trip, we shall see that, checkered too by great crosses and humiliations, her voyage nevertheless bore precious fruit for her struggling Community. In addition to the documents mentioned above, Monseigneur de la Hailandière wrote personally to Bishop Bouvier commending Mother Theodore to his benevolent charity.²⁰

At the time of her departure from Vincennes Bishop de la Hailandière went east to the Fifth Provincial Council of Baltimore and was present on May 13 at the meeting preliminary to the opening of the deliberations next day. Several letters from him to Mother Theodore must have been received at different points of her journey. Bishop Chabrat of Kentucky, who also attended the Council, carried a letter addressed to Havre. He was going abroad by steamer and would probably arrive in France about the same time as the Sisters. Bishop de la Hailandière remained some days in the East after the close of the Council. He wrote to Mother Theodore from New York:

MY GOOD MOTHER:

I came to New York; you were no longer there. I shall leave here tomorrow to return to our poor Indiana and your pious daughters. Before leaving I wish to trace you a few lines that some friendly hand will take to Havre. I have seen Mr. Byerley, Mme. Parmentier, and Mme. Bayer. I thanked them for their kindness to you.

Oh! what progress religion is making here! We find here now, and in almost all the eastern cities not only numerous Catholics, but pious souls! The Month of Mary has been made in a thousand places. What a cause for hope! The public mind is still Protestant and will be so for a long time, nevertheless Catholicism is penetrating everywhere; its truth appears to the eyes of men who are highest on the social ladder. There are some already who see in the future no other guarantee of security for the stability of the Union but Catholicism. Oh! what a future for us! May we not be wanting to our vocation! A large portion is reserved for you in this future.

I have no news of St. Mary's. I think all is well there. I remained here some days after the Council without any positive necessity, and almost solely in the hope

¹⁸ 30 avril, 1843. S.M.W.A.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Printed in full in *Life and Lifework of Mother Theodore Guérin*, p. 255.

of prevailing upon some of the Bishops to go to Vincennes. We shall be there by Corpus Christi. I hope we shall have three or four bishops in the procession, those of New Orleans, St. Louis, Texas, etc. You will be absent; but you will assist elsewhere in France, and the God whom you adore will be also the God to whom we shall offer our homage, whom we shall beg to bless us. We shall be all at the same time on our knees in Indiana and in France, and all the Catholic world will do the same.

I was obliged to interrupt my letter. I take it up again this evening. Would you be able to guess where we passed the day? . . . At some rich Catholic's of this great city? No; where then? Would you believe it? Visiting the public establishments of New York, in the city and outside, and the Corporation it was who did all the honors and paid all the expenses, carriages, boats, attendants, dinner for four Bishops and their suites. All that was offered to us and accepted. What progress! Seven years ago Monseigneur Bruté brought us here almost secretly; today we are presented to the great ones of the city, and the great are happy to have a kind word to say to us! Must this not give courage? It is true that it is different in Indiana. Nevertheless, let us hope.

You see I do not write, I talk. I speak like a prattling child, but then it is only to you that I say all these things. I told you already in my last letter a part of what we did at the Council: Six new Sees, six new Bishops, consequently, plus two Coadjutors, that will make twenty-three Sees, and in counting the Coadjutors, twenty-seven Bishops.

But I must close. It is late. I am anxious to receive the first news about you, to learn that the passage was not too painful and that you arrived happily in port. Write me a long letter. Many kind regards to dear Sister Cecilia. I await a letter from her. I beg of God to bless you.

All yours,

CEL. Bp. of Vinc.²¹

These were encouraging words with no hint of the latent displeasure they had grown to dread.

The travelers had probably taken the same Perth Amboy Railroad from Philadelphia to New York which had carried Mother Theodore and her five companions three years earlier. The route therefore did not have the character of absolute novelty. Certainly the great engine "already smoking," the canal boats, and the crowds of passengers were not now a subject of surprise. Crossing the bay on the ferry she felt no longer a stranger. When they walked along the streets of New York and rode in an omnibus to the East River ferry station, she was meeting well remembered landmarks, but she must have observed the rapid changes to which the Bishop had referred. The lusty and growing city poised on its island rock was reaching out toward Greenwich and Harlem. Under the great waves of Irish immigration which week by week in the old Cunarders rolled forward and broke upon the city, its Catholic population increased by thousands. A scion of this intelligent and aggressive nation now wore the mitre of New York, and the poor immigrant's child, John Hughes, never forgot the Celtic race nor the suffering island that gave him birth. A policy, now seen to be mistaken, retained the Irish immigrants to a large extent in the urban centers of the Atlantic seaboard, where they drifted into the hard labor of the public works with their incitement to rioting and intemperance. A kinder influence would have settled them, an

²¹ n. d., French postmark, 3 juillet, 1843, S.M.W.A.

agricultural people in their homeland, upon the widespread farms of the Middle West. Nevertheless the Irish Catholic immigrant was to wield a mighty influence in the 40's and 50's in building up the Church in the United States. New York was reaching out to cultural influences of all kinds, and the innate American thirst for intellectual advancement was seen in all sorts of literary and educational endeavors.

Not at this time when crossing the continent nor ever afterward was there any longer necessity of wearing secular dress. Mother Theodore had learned by experience how respectful the native Americans were to all women, but undoubtedly much of the esteem she received was due to her kindness and friendliness. Though queenly and dignified in manner, she saw in every human being the immortal soul redeemed by the Precious Blood of Christ, and her simple, gracious, attractive manners drew all hearts to her. Sister Saint Francis Xavier tells this fact to her sister Pepa as she learned it in New York in 1841 during her six weeks stay at the Sacred Heart Convent:

Mother Theodore made a very favorable impression. . . . Mr. Byerley and all who had any intercourse with her esteem her very much. She certainly has extraordinary ability and the gift of making herself loved wherever she goes. She is a second edition of yourself. You were told she was ugly; nevertheless, Miss Kennedy told me that last year her brother, after he had seen Mother, said, "I have never met such a woman"; and remember, he does not know a word of French and she speaks dreadful English.²²

Mother Theodore's charity and consideration prompted her to deeds of kindness wherever she went, and the story of her benefactions preceded and followed her. She was also singularly perspicacious in detecting hidden distress and ingenious in meeting and supplying it. "I know," wrote her cousin Marie-Anne Heurtel from Saint-Servan in August, 1840, "that you performed a great act of charity at Havre in favor of a poor unfortunate person who had lost his purse. That will bring you good fortune."

Received and welcomed by the hospitable Parmentiers, the Sisters could remain however only a short time. During the Foundress's stay she learned that Mr. Byerley was planning to leave New York. Ruined in his business, he had turned his assets into cash. Eventually he purchased two farms, which he named St. Philomene and St. Liguori, in the vicinity of South Bend near his friends, Father Sorin and the Brothers. His estimable wife and his children had followed him into the Church.

By mid-May the two Sisters were on the *Sylvia*, blown toward France by the fresh breezes of late spring. Though the new steamboats, which were becoming more numerous from year to year, were swifter than the sailing ships, they were also more expensive, and the necessity of economizing had resulted in the choice of the *Sylvia*. The voyage, however, was very different from the first crossing in 1840, both in regard to the peacefulness of the passage and the lack of fear and apprehension on the part of the travelers. Through prayer and suffering Mother Theodore had grown and developed spiritually in a marvelous manner. Then she was uneasy at the prospect of a new and strange land, of an alien religion and tongue. Now, although oppressed with the burden of anxiety regarding

²² *The Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 164.

the Community she was leaving behind her, she had learned by suffering and hardship patiently borne, to place all her trust in God.

On the long days of late spring on shipboard with ample time to perform their devotions of Rule, the travelers had leisure for reflection and for more intimate communication than was permitted by their ordinary convent life at home in Indiana. Did Mother Theodore suspect that the gifted young Sister at her side during this ocean voyage would be her future successor, the second superior general of the Community? From her eagerness to give her every advantage of travel and contact with the religious spirit of Providence at its fountain head, one would infer that she did. At least she recognized that by her gifts, her competence, her education and capabilities, Sister Mary Cecilia, owing to the rapid Americanization of the Community, consequent largely upon the cessation of help from France, was destined as a native American to play a major part in the future development of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The Foundress also gave some time to the instruction which had become essential for Sister Mary Cecilia, who, since she was to be her companion at Ruillé, would necessarily obtain some cognizance of the primary object of Mother Theodore's voyage, that is, to consult their superiors concerning the increasing difficulties of her administration in Indiana. Sister Mary Cecilia, though not yet professed, was a mature and thoughtful woman of twenty-nine years. She had entered at an important time in the development of the Congregation of Providence in America, and the occasion was now opportune to confide to her some of the uncertainties and perplexities, some of the sharp trials, too, which had already increased the burden of poverty and anxiety connected with the Indiana foundation.

These difficulties naturally centered mainly about the person of Bishop de la Hailandière. All during this period, and later, the bitterest aspect of the cross which Mother Theodore had to carry came from the fact that practically all their troubles originated from the peculiar character of their superior and Bishop. Mother Theodore refers to this only rarely in her correspondence and then to no one but her superiors in France in confidential letters. The state of disaffection in the diocese was growing. Several of the oldest and most influential among the clergy had left, and others were planning to do so. In circumstances such as these, the little convent in the woods was likely to become a storm center. It was almost the only one of the Bishop's projects which was growing satisfactorily, and in his trouble and disappointment with the diocese in general he was turning more and more toward the Community at Saint Mary's for the consolation which he sought so eagerly and which so continually eluded him. "This rising community," he confessed later to Sister Basilide, "was my only hope, my only consolation after having alienated all my priests for its sake and covered myself with debts."²³

Mother Theodore doubtless also during the long days when the fresh ocean winds were speeding them towards France had time for more mature and uninterrupted reflection. Did she at this time write down those all-important questions later presented for solution to Bishop Bouvier and the members of the Particular Council at Ruillé? We know from the

²³ Sister Basilide à Mother Theodore, 21 février, 1844. S.M.W.A.

Bishop himself that she did have for her consultations such an agenda, of which he kept a copy with the answers in Mother Theodore's own writing. During those days, too, of enforced inaction, so different from her busy life in Indiana, Mother Theodore no doubt had time for a few misgivings. Despite her position of Foundress and superior general of an already prospering Community, she never assumed any other attitude before her strict Mother General in France than that of a novice, often it seems a recalcitrant one. Would Mother Mary see the necessity of her voyage, and would she approve of it? Mother Theodore had written that she feared Mother Mary might think it rash and unwarranted by circumstances, as actually happened.

Early in June after a prosperous voyage the two travelers sighted the ship-congested harbor of Le Havre, and a little later, on June 6, stood upon the historic, and to every Sister of Providence the always beloved soil of Catholic France. Railroads were penetrating slowly into France, and it was no doubt over the same diligence route as they had taken in July, 1840, that they drove south through Normandy from Honfleur, past the green fields and orchards, the gray streets and storied cathedrals of Lisieux and Argentan, Séez and Alençon, to Henry II's old red town of Le Mans. Here on June 9 they knelt before their advocate and counselor, their father and friend, John Baptist Bouvier, Bishop of Le Mans. In this, their first brief interview, he heard Mother Theodore's tentative plans and examined her credentials from Bishop de la Hailandière. On that date he wrote in his own hand the authentication still preserved in the archives at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods:

We certify that the letter written on the other part of this sheet is really from the Bishop of Vincennes; that this Bishop is personally known to us and has both our esteem and our affection. We compassionate in their great need the Sisters whom we have given to him, and whom he recommends to the liberality of charitable souls.

J. B., Bishop of Mans

Le Mans, June 9, 1843.

Of the personalities destined to play a major role in the conservation to the Sisters of Providence in America of their forest home and even in their corporate survival during the ensuing crucial four years, none is more important than this kindly, upright, erudite, and distinguished prelate. In the post-Revolutionary era in France which produced ecclesiastics like Lacordaire and Dupanloup, Bishop Bouvier in his own chosen field of dogmatic and moral theology stands as professor, mentor, and director for over half a century, through his *Institutiones Theologicae*, to the rising priesthood not only of France, but also of Canada and the United States. Born at Chateau-la-Forêt in the Department of Mayenne in 1783 of the old Catholic peasantry of France, he received the haphazard classical education of the period while working at his father's trade of carpentry and was able to enter the Seminary of Angers only at the age of twenty-two in 1805. His acumen and the philosophical bent of his mind, however, prepared him for learned pursuits, and immediately after his ordination he became professor of philosophy. Transferred to the diocesan seminary of Le Mans in 1811, he spent twenty-three years there as professor of philosophy and moral theology, superior, and Vicar General, and in 1834,

became Bishop of the diocese. His *Institutiones Theologicae*, which ran through fifteen editions, had the distinction of being the first and for many years the only manual well adapted to that period of transition (1830-1870) marked by the death struggles of Gallicanism and Jansenism and by the work of reform in all departments of ecclesiastical learning.²⁴ After a long life devoted to the interests of religion this distinguished prelate died in Rome in 1854, after assisting at the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Bishop Bouvier had been closely associated with the Ruillé Community for many years. He accompanied Monseigneur Carron during his three-day inquiry into the affairs of the Sisters in the critical and delicate circumstances of 1831 and later became, in a sense, their second Founder by writing the Rule of 1835. He continued as ecclesiastical superior of the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir till his death, and no one stood nearer to the struggling Community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods during all the years of trials than he. His word had been the final one in the deliberations consequent upon Bishop de la Hailandière's request for Sisters in August, 1839, and Mother Theodore always looked upon him as the Founder of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Despite the responsibilities of an important diocese, he was never too occupied to listen to the story of their trials or to give them the benefit of his wise, prudent, and learned counsel. One of the first authorities in Europe on Canon Law, he could speak both to them and for them with an authority which no one could question. Thus it was that not only his wisdom but his erudition gave Mother Theodore complete confidence in taking his decisions as final and in following them with fidelity and reverence in the organization and government of the Community to the end of her life.

Her next concern after her visit to Bishop Bouvier was to seek at Ruillé the help and consolation she needed by talking over with Mother Mary and her councilors the necessities of the Indiana mission. She sought not only their counsel in regard to particular problems but also as to a settled line of conduct to guide her in the development and future organization of the American Community. This all important work superseded in Mother Theodore's mind the collection of funds and must have occupied most of the time of her stay at Ruillé, both now and during her second visit to the motherhouse in September.

The joy and gratitude with which she saw again the beloved cradle of her religious life and embraced her Sisters were too deep for her affectionate heart to express in words. With great emotion she knelt in the chapel where she had pronounced her vows and frequented every loved spot even to the *petit bois* near the convent where Father Dujarié had so often rested and where she had given him the famous bowl of soup. Prosperity was dawning upon Ruillé, and an addition almost as large as the original structure now rose to the right of the chapel, erected during 1842 by Mother Mary.

Her Sisters found Mother Theodore greatly changed in the three years since she had left them. The sorrows and graces and responsibilities of a religious Foundress had immensely exalted and ennobled her, and despite

²⁴ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Article "Bouvier."

all her profound devotion to the France she loved so dearly, the France of Joan of Arc, of Charlemagne, and of St. Louis, her missionary vow now bound her to her faraway forest home. If her vocation of Foundress of a Congregation of missionary Sisters had drawn her close to the Heart of Christ and had redoubled all her old gracious charm, it had also broken her physically. One who met her at this time has left his impression of the contrast at once brought home to the observer between her magnanimity and greatness of soul and her frail exterior:

Only to see Sister Theodore one would judge her incapable of accomplishing any great or lasting work, so marked was the contrast between her fine and lofty mind, her heart overflowing with devotedness and generosity, and an incomparable grace of eloquence and speech, all these excellent gifts of mind and heart united to a physique so delicate and fragile that the least fatigue would seem able to destroy.²⁵

Sister Mary Cecilia, however, the "demi-Indienne," was a great surprise to the French Sisters. This tall, graceful, finely-educated young religious with her fluent French was hardly consonant with the ideas of *sauvages* which they had formed from reading the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*.

After a few days at Ruillé Mother Theodore turned at once to her work of collecting funds. France should have been to her a sympathetic and fruitful field of labor. From the foundation of the *Société de la Propagation de la Foi* in 1822 with its decided trend toward the American missions, France took its place as the first and greatest contributor to the work of the French missionaries in the United States. This fact was due to several reasons, among them the coincidence that Mme. Petit,²⁶ who figures as one of the prime initiators of the work with Mlle. Jaricot, had spent nine years of her life in America as an exile from her home in Santo Domingo after the insurrection of the blacks in 1793, and also that she was interested in contributing funds to the diocese of her compatriot, Bishop Dubourg of New Orleans. Bishop Flaget's two-year tour of France (1837-1839) at the request of Pope Gregory XVI, had popularized and solidified the society, which became a world-wide pontifical association in 1840. Mother Theodore's work fitted therefore into the mission-minded French atmosphere of the day, and was still further prepared and assisted by the previous publicity resulting from the collecting tours of Bishop Bruté in 1835-1836 and of Bishop de la Hailandière in 1839. The magic word *Vincennes* had drawn Irma le Fer de la Motte to Ruillé and eventually in 1841, to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, as we have seen, and the relatives and friends of the French missionary priests who had accompanied the two Bishops to Indiana were to be met with all over Brittany and in other sections of France. The prospects should have been therefore most favorable for another appeal to the charitable heart of Catholic France.

To Mother Theodore's intense surprise and disappointment, however, she quickly became aware that for several cogent reasons her voyage seemed likely to prove a financial failure. Disasters of various kinds had brought distress to the working class of the sections of Brittany which she visited, and economic changes had fallen heavily upon other parts of

²⁵ Léon Aubineau: *Les Serviteurs de Dieu au XIX Siècle* (Victor Palmé, Paris, 1875), p. 344.

²⁶ Mother of the Kentucky Jesuit missionary, Father Louis (Nicholas) Petit.

France. The season of the year was most inopportune. People of means who were in a position to contribute generously had left the cities for their country homes to return only at the approach of winter. All in all, the outlook was not encouraging. Her friends, nevertheless, Bishop Bouvier, the Sisters of Providence in their various houses, and the relatives of the American Sisters, did their best, and Mother Theodore began with her customary good judgment and ingenuity to make the most of her slender opportunities. Thus this extraordinary woman, intrepid and resourceful in her immense confidence in Divine Providence, began these months of ceaseless journeyings to and fro in the northwest and center of France where her work was known. Handicapped by delicate health and weakened by her impaired digestion, which had for years condemned her to a perpetual fast, she put aside fatigue and discouragement and literally left no stone unturned where she saw the slightest hope of assistance. Eventually she was eminently successful. She realized something like six thousand dollars in money, and on her return was accompanied by three postulants and a gardener, who was for many years in charge of the orchards and vegetable garden at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. She made friends everywhere. If circumstances in which she recognized the Will of God, had not ordained that she must leave the field at the most auspicious moment and spend the two following months, which would have meant double returns for her labor in France, in crossing the winter Atlantic amid terrible hardships to fall sick of exhaustion and anxiety for another two months at New Orleans, she would have returned with increased resources in every respect.

During the months of June and July and much of August, Mother Theodore's itinerary is not easy to establish. Part of that time she must have spent in Brittany, where at Fougères and Saint-Servan she visited the families of her Sisters in Indiana. At the latter place she made the acquaintance of the charming and devoted family of Le Fer de la Motte, Sister Saint Francis Xavier's delightful home circle, which lives and breathes in the letters, which when published later by her sister in *Une Femme Apôtre*, were read and enjoyed all over France. Irma had written to her mother, and Madame Le Fer interested herself deeply in Mother Theodore's quest.

Anjou seems to have been her first field of endeavor, and her success was almost nil. "Poor Mother," wrote Sister Basilide, when Mother Theodore's letters reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, "you seem greatly pained and discouraged, but we all thought that it was without reason. No one here expected you to succeed in the part of the country which you visited first. If you had written after visiting Brittany and doing all you could there, I confess that I would have been entirely disheartened. I am convinced however that your own people will be more satisfactory."²⁷ Mother Theodore's credentials and letters of approval from Monseigneur Godefroy de Saint Marc, Bishop of Rennes, are dated August 3, 1843, and from that date we lose sight of her till August 29, the date of a similar letter from Monseigneur Jacques-Jean-Pierre de Mée, Bishop of Saint-Brieuc, her native diocese in Brittany.

²⁷ 18 août, 1843. S.M.W.A.

Though the prime objectives of Mother Theodore's voyage were eventually realized, her absence owing to adverse circumstances lengthened to nearly a year. She had left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at the end of April, 1843, and it was April again when she saw her beloved forest home once more. Her stay in France however lasted not quite six months; the long tempestuous voyage home and the critical illness which overtook her at the convent of the hospitable Ursulines in New Orleans detained her four months longer.

To Sister Saint Francis Xavier had fallen at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods all Mother Theodore's duties in regard to the Sisters and the novices. The instruction of the latter had already been confided to her in part, but now she must give the daily conference called *Catéchisme* at five o'clock each evening at which the professed Sisters also assisted. She noted in the Community diary two days after Mother Theodore's departure, "Sister Saint Francis gives catechism for the first time." On May 3 she registers another landmark, "First chapter is held by poor Sister Saint Francis." Letters from Mother Theodore written en route reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at the middle and again at the end of May, after which no word came from her for nearly two months till July 21. Of the letters written during her voyage almost none have been preserved. One single missive from Madame Parmentier's house in Brooklyn to Sister Mary Xavier has bridged the years, a motherly letter of practical spiritual counsel and gentle chiding for a grief at parting which might be displeasing to the Sacred Heart of their Divine Spouse.

During these months of June, July, and August which saw the Foundress busily engaged upon her mission of soliciting funds in France, events had been crowding close upon one another half way round the world at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Every day of your voyage, wrote Sister Saint Liguori from Saint Francisville in June, 1843, Sister Augustine and I have followed you in spirit wherever we think you may be, and then we share as much as we can the fatigues you have undergone and those which are before you. May we hope to see you again before the end of the year? . . . but why speak of this when we all know that you will return as soon as you possibly can! We have prayed a great deal for this intention, and we will continue our supplications. We had the happiness to receive your letter from Cincinnati, but not the one from New York, which is still in Sister Saint Vincent's possession. Do not fail, dear Mother, when you write, to speak of your voyage, and your health, concerning which we are so uneasy.²⁸

This letter prepaid twenty-five cents to Havre had still further postage to be collected at La Chartre-sur-Loir, the nearest point to Ruillé. Like many letters of the early days, which were read all along the route, especially if they came from Europe, the seal of this letter had been broken at Vincennes, and it bore messages from friends written on the fold which at this period still served as an envelope.

May, the third month of Mary since the Sisters' arrival in Indiana, opened at Saint Mary's with the usual zealous devotion. Sister Saint Francis Xavier's ardent love for the Queen of Heaven, Our Lady of the Woods, as they loved to call her, was in no measure diminished from her

²⁸ Sister St. Liguori à Mother Theodore, 27 juin, 1843. S.M.W.A.

girlhood days when in her home parish she had been instrumental in establishing May devotions, until then hardly known at Saint-Servan, in her reunions of poor children to whom she taught religion.²⁹ Father Corbe gave permission for a general Communion to open the month, which closed with an extra Communion and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, so highly prized in those early days of spiritual privation.

The Community activities continued much as usual. The pupils of the *pensionnat* celebrated Sister Basilide's feast on June 12, and the hearts of the Sisters were gladdened by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament each evening of the octave of Corpus Christi. The village children, the boys and girls of the free schools, were established at this time in the basement of the academy where during Sister Agnes's illness the young American novice, Sister Philomene Doyle, replaced her. "I have scholars taller than I," she wrote to Mother Theodore. "I find it a little difficult to keep order . . . but I do not like to punish the poor little things. Sister Basilide laughs at my gravity."³⁰ Sister Philomene was sacristan also at the new parish church, still unfinished, and had care of the altar and the vestments. "We have had High Mass many times at the parish. I have had to take there all the most beautiful things from our chapel by obedience to Mr. Corbe. We have no flowers . . . but I have asked Sister Saint Francis to make some."³¹ The mosquito season and the extreme heat were upon them, and Sister Olympiade had devised an original smudge of her own, which she placed near the chapel door for the Sisters' consolation, as she said. They sang at High Mass on all the feast days, the Ascension, Pentecost, and Corpus Christi. The French Sisters were well-trained in plain chant; some of the American novices had good voices, and Sister Mary Xavier, or as she generally came to be called, Sister Mary, could always be relied upon to start the French hymns, which were generally sung in the Community till the 1870's.

The novices wrote to Mother Theodore all the details of their daily lives, telling her too how much they missed her. Even Mignon, the yellow cat, had pined away, but their recreations were still joyous. They sang the Litany of Loretto every day during May for her intentions. The pupils of the *pensionnat* were present and joined their voices to those of the novices. M. de la Bertaudière's statue of Our Lady disappeared under the abundance of flowers, roses, bluebells, and cowslips. The Bishop had delayed in the East and came for his first visit to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods after Mother Theodore's departure only on July 1. The novices wrote that his stay was short but "he was exceedingly kind and promised to return soon. . . . I never saw him in better spirits," continued Sister Mary Celestia.³²

When the Bishop arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, he found Sister Saint Francis Xavier acting superior as Mother Theodore had arranged, and everything in quiet, order, and contentment. He at once took charge of every slight detail of the Sisters' daily life. Sister Basilide had some

²⁹ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 65.

³⁰ Sister Philomene to Mother Theodore, July 7, 1843. S.M.W.A.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² July 7, 1843. S.M.W.A.

money, and sufficient food had been provided by Mother Theodore. They were not obliged therefore to ask any funds from the Bishop. The disaffection and discontent in the diocese were already weighing heavily upon him, and he turned to Saint Mary's for a few days relaxation and the consolation he needed and sought so eagerly. Never was he more amiable to the Community at large. But as usual with his peculiar talent for creating dissension, he left the two Sisters who were in charge in turmoil. He was very desirous of arranging for the retreat and the *prise d'habit* in August, though it was six weeks away, and Mother Theodore had left no directions for either event. The retreat would be possible in her absence, but not the reception of novices. She could not decide four months in advance upon the dispositions and capabilities of the postulants, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier was neither able nor willing to assume this responsibility in the superior general's absence. The Community was going through a period of such hardship and penury that some even of the young Americans inured to the privations of the frontier became discouraged. Of the four novices who wrote so affectionately to Mother Theodore on the seventh of July, 1843, only one persevered.

Both Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Basilide were amazed to observe the Bishop's open hostility to Mother Theodore. Sister Saint Francis had to listen to a two-hour attack upon her absent superior, at the end of which the poor young Sister was reduced to silence and tears but apparently was not shaken in her love and loyalty towards Mother Theodore. That this interview was not without some effect upon her however appears in one of those intimate letters, which she afterwards wrote to the Bishop and which are explained by their long acquaintance in France and by the close friendship which existed between their families:

But if there ever was a time when you shook my confidence in her [Mother Theodore] to the very root, it was on July 4 under the porch. Oh, must I recall that conversation from ten till noon, at the end of which I addressed you in these words, "Yes, my Lord, if anyone had tried to tell me about you all that you have just said concerning our Mother, I would entreat her not to continue. . . ."³³

His only answer to her distress and her tears was the famous line from the third act of Corneille's *Cid* in which Chimène mourns the tragedy which has darkened her life, "Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux, et fondez-vous en eau," which, she said, "my heart finished silently, 'La moitié de ma vie a mis l'autre au tombeau.'"³⁴

Since the Bishop had failed to destroy Mother Theodore's influence over her, he turned to Sister Basilide, who proved a much easier conquest. His open disregard for their superior, which Sister Saint Francis had seen and deplored and which Mother Theodore bore in silence, had somehow escaped Sister Basilide's notice, and when the Bishop left her, he had succeeded in partially alienating her from Mother Theodore and in separating the two who were now in charge at Saint Mary's, and who had been hitherto so united. Sister Saint Francis Xavier was deeply disappointed that Sister

³³ 28 décembre [probably 1845]. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ Weep, weep, my eyes, and melt away in tears,
One half of my life has placed the other in the tomb.

CORNEILLE'S *Cid*, Act. III.

Basilide would be so lacking in uprightness and loyalty, but was too charitable to show her feelings or to express them even to Mother Theodore. Sister Basilide in their long joint letter of July 7 did not spare her absent superior, but as she sincerely cherished her vocation, her conclusion was that if things were as bad as she now saw them to be, her only alternative was to leave the sinking ship as soon as possible and return to Ruillé. The difficulties and dangers of their situation terrified her, and after a detailed account of the Bishop's visit, she adds to her letter:

No one knows all this but Sister Saint Francis. I thought of writing to Ruillé to our Mother to inform her of my position, and as she knows me, I think she would not leave me here thus exposed to be lost. You see that when I ask to return to France, it is not without reason. If I have never spoken so openly to you before, it was because I was always hoping, but now I see that a decision must be made. I will write to our Mother in a few weeks. I wished to let you know in advance. Speak to her of the matter if you judge proper. I will say nothing of the other house [Providence]. Sister Saint Francis will tell you her difficulties. Only now have I ceased to regret remaining with her as I feel I have been of some utility to her. We are not in need. I asked no money from Monseigneur. I must tell you that he was exteriorly very amiable with everyone and did not show his displeasure, which however was not small.

She closes their long letter with a list of their needs which Mother Theodore was to secure in France:

black and white yarn for knitting, worsted for tapestry in all colors, (the Richardsons would like a pound and Calista Hillebert half a pound); canvas of different weights, twist silk in skeins, silk cord in different colors, good points and privilege cards, bill heads, paper and accessories for making artificial flowers, sabots and shoes and hose, brass wire, hooks for our chaplets, clinchers flat at the end, and at least a good clock. If we had one to put in our belfry, it would serve for everything. The musician wishes piano strings of all sizes.

Sister Olympiade has told me many times to say that she misses you very much, but she is not alone in that. How long the time is and no letter from you yet! Hope alone sustains us. . . . We shall have our commencement on the third of August, and I will write to you immediately afterward. Succeed and come back quickly to one who desires you with all her heart.

Your poor child Basilide.³⁵

There were several points in this letter which must have puzzled and worried Mother Theodore. Why was the Bishop transacting all business with Sister Basilide when Sister Saint Francis Xavier had been left in charge? Mother Theodore was further grieved by Mother Mary's attitude, as she did not entirely approve of the journey. "The voyage to France so soon is generally criticized," she wrote to Sister Basilide, and she blamed Mother Theodore for not arranging with Bishop de la Hailandière in advance the two matters which were the cause of his anger: the retreat and the *prise d'habit*.³⁶ On her return from France Mother Theodore humbly begged his pardon on her knees for this and anything else in her conduct which had pained him.

Undoubtedly the Bishop during his conferences had insisted on complete independence of Ruillé. He was now prepared to assert what he

³⁵ 8 juillet, 1843. S.M.W.A.

³⁶ 24 septembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

considered his rights over the Community to the full. Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote at the same time as Sister Basilide to Mother Theodore:

God be blessed. You arrived safe. It is always a new joy for me to tell you that we are well. The good God is protecting us in a special, we may say, in a miraculous manner. He wishes no doubt thus to prepare us for some new sacrifice. If He protects the flock in the absence of the shepherd, He has not spared the poor *dog* in order to render it more faithful. Monseigneur's last determination, the most evident and the most painful, is our complete separation from Ruillé. What shall I say to you now? My good Superior, must I reveal to you the painful wounds of my heart? No, for you know them. I would rather speak to you of the infinite goodness of our Saviour. To Him I have given myself and how sincerely He has accepted me! How He consoles me and what care He has of the peace of our little community! He hides our troubles with Monseigneur from the eyes of our Sisters, and He gives to them all health, union, and tranquillity, one heart to desire the return of their dear Mother Theodore. Poor children, must we abandon them? No, never. I know not what will be the destiny of this dear Congregation, but I cannot believe that God will forsake it. As for myself, if I were still my own property, I would be greatly troubled about my future. But that is no longer my concern, since I belong to Jesus. Pray for me that I may die rather than distrust ever so little the love of our Divine Master. I have to struggle in order to keep in my soul the sentiment of profound obedience which I owe to Monseigneur. My judgment revolts even while my will submits. . . .

Good Mr. Corbe is a providential help for me, and he has told me what to do on several occasions. He knows Monseigneur so well that I am without fear when I follow his advice. He is deeply attached to you and to our house and shares our joy at your safe arrival and our desire for your return. . . . Poor Sisters of Ruillé and my dear Superiors, God must be very powerful to make me fear seeing you again. I can say truly that I am more attached to Ruillé than ever I was to my own family. But what need have we of words? We have given ourselves without reserve to Jesus. Everything is in that. If we can love Him and cause Him to be loved even at the expense of our whole spiritual and corporal being! . . . What shall I say, dear Mother, of your few lines so good and touching? Alas, it is now that I really understand suffering of heart and soul.³⁷

The Bishop left on July 4, and life at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods dropped back to its even tenor. Sister Basilide's response to the new developments was a reiterated request to Mother Theodore to facilitate her return to Ruillé:

I told you that the storm had passed, that our good Mr. Corbe had done his utmost to pacify the Bishop. He thought he had succeeded. We were rejoicing, and your long-desired letter came to crown our happiness. Alas, how short it was. . . . In a letter addressed to Mr. Corbe, who read it to us, Bishop de la Hailandière explained at length all his rights over us. . . . for it seems that the Bishop of Le Mans has given them all up to him, even the right to change our Holy Rule, and that for the future he will separate us from Ruillé and we are to depend upon no one but him.

No doubt we shall thus see something new. I do not know whether he intends writing to the Bishop of Le Mans to inform him, but if you consent to all this and to return, I beg of you to make arrangements for me to go at once on your arrival . . . for if our Constitutions and the religious habit are to be changed, I would think myself in another Community, and I certainly would be.³⁸

³⁷ 7 juillet, 1843. S.M.W.A.

³⁸ 1 août, 1843. S.M.W.A.

One day in mid-July Sister Saint Francis Xavier was the occasion of a serious loss to the Community. Explaining the value of some pieces of money to a postulant, she opened the box in which their meager funds were kept. As she left at once, without removing the key, when the bell rang for a spiritual exercise, one of the Community workmen, employed a short distance away, availed himself of the circumstance to rob them of twenty-four dollars, all the money they had. Sister Saint Francis was distressed and contrite, and at once betook herself to urgent prayer to Saint Joseph. To her great joy an amount in value to double the sum lost was received unexpectedly before the end of the month.

Their standing with the merchants at Terre Haute was now much better. To one who had come twice for his money Sister Basilide was able to pay something. "Mr. Crawford has renewed his promise to give me whatever we need. To him we owe nothing. Messrs. Smith and Button made me the same offer. I paid them in full, and we now have seventeen dollars."³⁹ Only three of their own patrons, however, paid anything, and these only a part of their indebtedness. Ready money continued for years to be very scarce in the western country.

The commencement was eminently successful. "I was not present at the exhibition," wrote the Bishop to Mother Theodore. "It is said to have been exceedingly interesting. Prospects for the coming year are very flattering. A pupil arrived the last day of the retreat. A gentleman from Indianapolis has promised me to send his daughter; another from Columbus also."⁴⁰ Sister Basilide's account was more detailed. Father Michael Edgar Evelyn Shawe, the eloquent former pastor of St. Michael's Church at Madison, who was at that time attached to the Vincennes Cathedral, presided:

Our distribution had a very good effect. Everyone appeared delighted. . . . Though we have remained almost without money, and Monseigneur has given us nothing, we have not suffered. Everyone at Terre Haute is very well disposed. One of the merchants offered me several times to furnish anything I wished and even to procure what they did not have without asking for a penny "before the Mother's return." Another gentleman brought me his two little girls telling me to do as I wished with them, something which would not have happened earlier.⁴¹

In another earlier letter Sister Basilide described in most satisfactory terms the public examination of the pupils of the *pensionnat*:

All passed off *à merveille*. The children answered Mr. Shawe's questions with an assurance which gave great pleasure to their parents and to the large audience. We had arranged the stage on the porch near the classroom from which the children came and went in an orderly manner, for good Mr. Shawe examined in every branch, even the French. He proposed questions for which the children were in no way prepared, but they answered without hesitation. Judge Huntington delivered an eloquent address in which he detailed the advantages of our institution, even its location, against which there has been so much prejudice and opposition. He spoke in the manner of one deeply prepossessed in our favor. Mr. Shawe conferred the premiums with suitable remarks and terminated the exercises with an appropriate discourse which was very well received. Never have I seen the children more con-

³⁹ 18 août, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁰ 23 août, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁴¹ 6 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A. Sister Basilide à Mother Theodore.

tented. They separated from us with deep emotion. I think that almost all will return. Three new pupils have already announced themselves, and a charming little French girl, a Catholic from Peru [Jane Aveline] has arrived. Her father is a wealthy trader with the Indians. Next month the Indians will pay for everything furnished them during the year, and he will pay his entire account in advance. . . .⁴²

The days passed by, and the Sisters began to believe that, mollified by Father Corbe, the Bishop had no intention of pursuing further his plan to give the religious habit at the close of the retreat. They reckoned, however, without his Breton tenacity. About a week after his departure he wrote asking about the reception in August, who would receive the religious habit, and who would be professed. A week later he wrote in the same strain to Father Corbe and to Sister Basilide announcing his coming for the retreat and ordering that the Sisters of the two mission houses of Jasper and Saint Francisville be directed to make preparations to return to the motherhouse. Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine arrived on August 3.

The three Jasper Sisters, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer and the two novices, Sister Marie Joseph and Sister Gabriella, were not present. They had missed the retreat of the previous year with the Bishop's permission. This year, on leaving Jasper on their way to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods descending a slight eminence the driver lost control of his horses, and the Sisters were thrown from the conveyance. Sister Marie Joseph's arm was broken and Sister Saint Vincent badly shaken up and bruised. The latter was unable to leave the house for nearly two months, and Sister Marie Joseph's arm was so badly set the first time that it had to be reset and remained for a long time almost useless. Sister Gabriella escaped with no bones broken, but she was ill for some weeks afterwards with the prevalent malaria. Sister Marie Joseph's profession was thus postponed the second time for another year. Shortly afterward the Bishop appointed her, though still a novice, to be superior at Jasper when he removed Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer.

The Bishop preached the retreat alone and heard all the confessions except Sister Saint Francis Xavier's which he refused to hear. During this time he spent long hours interviewing the Sisters and inquiring into and altering the minutiae of their daily life. He changed the hours of meals, ordered that their morning meditation would no longer be made in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and discovering that Mother Theodore had never permitted Sister Saint Francis Xavier, on account of her delicate health, to rise till the fires were made and the chill off the house in winter, ordered her to rise at five with the other Sisters.

Suddenly at eight o'clock on the last evening of the retreat he told Sister Basilide that Sister Mary Xavier and Sister Agnes would be professed the next morning. As nothing had been said to Sister Saint Francis Xavier who had charge of the novices, she had not given them the special preparation which ordinarily precedes profession. The Bishop had already informed Sister Agnes, but Sister Mary Xavier was taken completely by surprise. To a French Sister familiar with the solemnity which surrounded the ceremony of profession at the motherhouse, which had thus far been

⁴² 18 août, 1843. S.M.W.A.

copied exactly at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, this was a great sacrifice. "You who know Sister Mary," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Mother Theodore, "will understand the state she was in, rushing to and fro in tears. . . . Sister Agnes in this circumstance has been as usual an American. I think she prepared well and that she serves the good God to the best of her ability."⁴³

The retreat closed on August 13. The Bishop was still at St. Mary's, and the Sisters were enjoying their noon-day recreation on the feast of the Assumption when he sent for the professed Sisters, Sister Saint Francis Xavier, Sister Basilide, Sister Olympiade, Sister Saint Liguori, and the two who had just taken their vows. The half past one bell had rung, but the feast day recreation continued for the rest of the afternoon. Monseigneur de la Hailandière met the group of six in Mother Theodore's room, and to their consternation announced that as her term of three years had expired, they would proceed to elect a superior. "I shall say nothing of the general effect. Some were pale and trembling. Others were praying. Twenty minutes later of the six votes cast, five were found to be for Sister Theodore. The sixth voter had written 'Ma Mère,' which does not prevent your being elected unanimously."⁴⁴ The Bishop also removed Sister Saint Francis at the same time and appointed Sister Basilide superior till Mother Theodore's return.

The Bishop was embroiled at Vincennes with the Eudists of Saint Gabriel's College and was now planning to transfer Saint Mary's Female School to the Sisters of Providence. Both these matters caused him pain and anxiety. His priests were in a state of uneasiness and confusion, and the case of the poor innocent young Alsatian priest now languishing under an unjust accusation weighed heavily upon the Bishop's mind. At Vincennes the superiors had changed several Sisters at Saint Mary's School contrary to the Bishop's wishes. He had now decided to hand over the school there to the Sisters of Providence at once, and he had induced the two Sisters, Sister Ann Austin and Sister Celestia, who had been transferred, to leave their own Community and seek admission at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

I have not told you, continued Sister Basilide, all the propositions in another letter to Mr. Corbe. Truly this good gentleman is admirable in the zeal and devotedness he shows for us. How many others would have given everything up. Far from that, seeing that matters had gone so far that it was difficult to decide them by correspondence, he went himself to Vincennes to arrange everything. The new points to be decided were whether we would accept the establishment at Vincennes and allow the Bishop to choose the Sisters to be placed there, and if Sister Austin and Sister Celestia . . . would present themselves, whether we would accept them.⁴⁵

The Bishop left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on August 17, but the spirit of unrest and insecurity which was in possession of the diocese had now penetrated to the convent. Sister Basilide had begun arrangements to return to Ruillé, and it was an open secret that Mother Theodore might

⁴³ A Mother Theodore, 16 août, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ 8 septembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

not be permitted to return. To Sister Saint Francis Xavier these were dark days:

God wishes you to be again on the cross, she wrote to Mother Theodore. Will it be at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods? He alone knows, and that is sufficient for me. My poor Mother, if we could only understand our happiness in having no one but God, in knowing nothing of this new and sombre future. During my retreat I made such efforts to thank God for having separated us from Ruillé that at its close I thought the division of my soul from my body was going to follow. To make matters worse, Monseigneur was displeased with me to such an extent as to refuse to hear my confession. Poor Sister Basilide was as afflicted by this circumstance as I was myself and wished to go to complain to him of it, but I prevented her. Finally at the end of the retreat I sent the Bishop a letter of humility and repentance by Mr. Corbe. I thought that since he was angry I must be guilty. The cause of his displeasure was that I thought we ought not to receive Sister Celestia. Perhaps I am wrong, but I do not feel we should accept as postulants persons who have been professed in another order for fifteen or twenty years. . . .

I cannot tell you how much consolation the other postulants have given us during the retreat. Poor children, the more I suffer at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, the more I love them. If then I love them so much, what must be your tenderness and devotion for them, you who are their Mother!⁴⁰

Gradually the pupils began to return. September 10 was the opening day, and this fourth year 1843-1844 showed a definite growth. Their enrollment reached thirty-two before the year closed. The largest number, twelve, were from Terre Haute, but the roster counted girls from Paris, Darwin, and Homer in Illinois, from Vincennes, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and Lafayette in Indiana, and two from faraway Louisiana. As was usual in the early years, they entered at any time. An old music master, for whom the Bishop had built a house on the place, joined the faculty to give piano lessons, and his wife taught the harp to the pupils.

Despite their poverty and privations a general air of progress began to permeate the school, and they had many visitors: Father Bellier from Saint Gabriel's College, Vincennes, who had crossed the continent with Sister Saint Francis Xavier in 1841, and Mr. and Mrs. Francis X. Linck of Evansville, whose daughter Augusta, Sister Mary Magdalen, was in the mistress of novices' words the "angel of the novitiate"; Father Lalmiere, since the previous year pastor of Saint Joseph's Church, Terre Haute, was a frequent visitor; Father Louis Ducoudray, pastor at Saint Francisville, came for Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine, who were to spend another month at his poor little mission; Mrs. Susan Williams was going to live with the Farringtons, and she came to bring her daughters, Sarah and Harriet, to school. She had made a special trip to Saint Mary's some months earlier to beg the Sisters' pardon for her complicity with their ex-novice, Sister Aloysia. Their lawyer friend, Mr. Benjamin Thomas, came from Vincennes, and in mid-September Father Martin, superior of the seminary, arrived bringing three seminarians for their vacation, one of them Sister Philomene's and Sister Lucy's young brother, Philip Doyle. On October 5 the Sisters entertained the Governor of Indiana, Samuel Bigger, who expressed surprise and pleasure at the growth and the encouraging prospects of the school. Brother John and Brother

⁴⁰ 16 août, 1843. S.M.W.A.

Lawrence from Notre Dame and Mr. Ernest Audran, the Bishop's nephew, whose younger brother Edward spent many months at Saint Mary's during these years, also were listed among the visitors before the end of the winter.

The fine autumn weather was very propitious for the outdoor work. Marcile came and went occasionally, directing the labor on the parish church, which was not yet completed owing to lack of funds. Sister Basilide was overseeing the final repairs before winter, painting the porch and whitewashing the interior of the rooms in the convent. "Mother's room" was carefully cleaned and everything put in repair in preparation for her return. Richardville had not yet finished the fences, begun in the spring.

Laugane [Logan Hagan] works like a man, wrote Sister Basilide giving details to Mother Theodore of the farm. He is large and strong and we are all well pleased with him. He takes Renault's [Brassier's] place very well. . . . Roquet is still with us. . . . You will see a few changes around our houses. Tell Sister Mary Cecilia that we have good walks to go to church and the *pensionnat* and no longer have to cross the fences. We have a good pump at each house.⁴⁷

All during this time divine service was being held on Sunday in the still unfinished parish church. Often through deep snow drifts, from which Sister Basilide's new made walks did not protect them, the Sisters crossed the bridge over the little brook, its ripple silenced by the frost. The pupils met them at the church door. High Mass was sung always on feast days, and with the furnishings sent from France and transferred by the Bishop from the Sisters' little chapel, the church began to take on an attractive appearance, gradually becoming something more than a faraway echo of the Pantheon upon which it was modeled. All the French priests were familiar with the grand old Gothic edifices which reared their spires aloft in practically every town of France. Almost all, too, had seen Paris and some also Rome, and it is to the classical structures of these two cities and not back further to the Gothic that ecclesiastical taste turned in Indiana. Despite the towering hardwood trees so abundant in the forests, the early churches of the diocese of Vincennes show none of the majestic pillared porticos which added grace and dignity to similar buildings elsewhere. By this time, however, the ensemble of buildings at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, especially when the leaves were on the embowering trees, offered an attractive picture. Even in midwinter, enveloped in snow and still buried in dense woods, the little *pensionnat* and convent, the church and presbytery were not equalled anywhere in the diocese except perhaps at Vincennes.

Nothing further had been said about the matters proposed by the Bishop during the retreat until the first week of October, when he wrote to say that the Sisters of Charity were giving up the school at Vincennes. To replace them, he had written to Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer at Jasper to be in readiness to leave there, and he chose the two Sisters who were to join her, Sister Philomene and Sister Mary Magdalen, both postulants, who had not yet received the religious habit. He ordered them to be vested privately. About a week later another letter came to Sister Basilide ordering her to send the two Sisters. "I have important matters which

⁴⁷ 1 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

keep me here, the Sisters, the seminary, moving, appointments, etc.”⁴⁸ This was their first intimation that the roomy and nicely equipped school buildings at Second and Church Streets in Vincennes, bought by Bishop Bruté in 1838 for the Sisters of Charity, were not to be for the Sisters of Providence. They were to be housed some blocks away in a two-story yellow house on the site now known as the Bishop's Block. He had given up his idea of erecting a new seminary building and sent word to Father Corbe that he had chosen another carpenter to complete the work on the church at Saint Mary's in place of Marcile. The three seminarians stayed on at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods until the moving at Vincennes was finished. Father Corbe was in general charge of repairs and work on the place at Saint Mary's under the Bishop's direction.

Father Corbe left Saint Mary's for Vincennes on October 23 according to the Bishop's orders accompanied by Sister Philomene and Sister Mary Magdalen. Three days later Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine were ordered by the Bishop to leave Saint Francisville for Vincennes thus closing that mission, and on October 29 Sister Celestia, the first of the two Sisters of Charity of whom there had been question during the summer, arrived unannounced at Saint Mary's. A week later the second Sister, Sister Ann Austin, followed her, and on December 1 the two Sisters of Providence from Saint Francisville were sent by the Bishop to Saint Peter's, the old Dant farm near Washington, the first site occupied by the Brothers of Holy Cross in America, near the present town of Montgomery.

As the Community expected Mother Theodore to sail from Havre for New Orleans, their December letters were addressed to her there.

We were quiet and tranquil for the remainder of August, wrote Sister Basilde, till the Bishop's return to Vincennes from a visit to the southern part of the diocese. Then he wrote to me that the Sisters. . . . were withdrawing from Vincennes and that we should give the religious habit unblessed to Sister Madeleine [sic] and Sister Philomene. He had sent for Sister Saint Vincent. . . . we could hardly get along without Sister Magdalen who was giving lessons to the postulants. Since he had no intention of leaving the Sisters at Saint Francisville, and since there was need of Sisters, we asked him to withdraw them. He replied that he had foreseen all our difficulties and that besides we had consented, thus we must send him the Sisters. (I do not know when we had given this consent.) Thus then we have three Sisters at Vincennes, two at Jasper, and none at Saint Francisville. He had sent for these last a few days later and proposed to locate them at Saint Peter's. . . . He has not written for three weeks, and we do not know whether he has sent the two Saint Francisville Sisters to Saint Peter's, or whether they are still at Vincennes.⁴⁹

Christmas, their fourth in America, came at last with its heavenly sweetness and joy, of which no earthly anxiety could entirely rob them. In true union of heart they knelt round the crib in their little chapel, and the ancient melody with its burden of memories reechoed on the mid-night air:

Venez, divin Messie,
Sauvez nos jours infortunés,
Venez, source de vie, venez, venez, venez.

⁴⁸ 16 octobre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ 1 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

Ah, descendez, hâtez vos pas
Sauvez les âmes du trépas,
Secourez-nous, ne tardez pas.
Venez, divin Messie,
Sauvez nos jours infortunés,
Venez, source de vie, venez, venez, venez.

The shrill voices of the children mingled with those of the Sisters in the time honored Noël:

Il est né, le divin Enfant,
Jouez, haut-bois, resonancez, musettes;
Il est né, le divin Enfant,
Chantons tous son avènement.
Depuis plus de quatre mille ans,
Nous le promettaient les Prophètes;
Depuis plus de quatre mille ans,
Nous attendions cet heureux temps.
Une étable est son logement,
Un peu de paille, sa couchette,
Une étable est son logement,
Pour un Dieu, quel abaissement!

The First Communion of the pupils of the day school preceded by a retreat made the day memorable. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had taken the major part in preparing the children, some of whom were boys of sixteen, eighteen, and nineteen years, for this, one of the most important days of their lives, and their piety and happiness consoled her anxious heart. On December 30 took place with all the ceremony the Sisters could muster, the *distribution des prix* for these children, some of whom would not return after their First Communion.

For a month now Mother Theodore had been sailing the winter Atlantic, exposed to its violent storms and bitter cold. No word had reached them however. Only on January 10 did they receive definite news of her departure from Havre. Father Chassé had left France earlier and reached America in mid-December. The hazards of the sailing ships of the period, their terrible hardships and delays in winter were well known to the Sisters, although they had all crossed the ocean at a more propitious season. Prayers went up daily for Mother Theodore's safety though they only learned with alarm later to what terrible perils she had been exposed.

CHAPTER XII

VOYAGE TO FRANCE—II

EFFORTS TO SECURE FUNDS

"Providence of God, calm in the tempest."

LITANY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

THE guerdon of heaven after death and a hundredfold in this life are promised by Truth Eternal to those who leave home and country for His service. Envisaging the religious life from without, especially in this present-day world of change and uncertainty, one sees this promised hundredfold rise to its highest point perhaps in a single element, its security. Within the sacred double rampart of her vows and Rule, the religious may serve God, tranquil and secure, in her chosen field.

In the earliest centuries a general and primitive Rule fitted the religious body into the crude civilization of the period. As time passed, however, and the complex conditions of modern times replaced the first simpler mould of society, the religious Rules suited themselves to changed conditions and needs, but were ever the protection of the individual. Roswitha imitating Plautus and Terence in her ninth century cloister, Gertrude giving her revelations to the world, Teresa seeking anew the ancient austerities of primitive Carmel, or the modern nuns of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, blazing a trail in education and social service, were each in her special sphere protected by the sacred aegis of her rule and shielded by the authority of the greatest advocate of the freedom of women that the world has ever known, the Catholic Church.

Pledged by solemn engagements to a fixed manner of life, the very obligations of the religious constitute a barrier which no power justly can menace even in that spiritual world where she has placed her happiness. Her superiors are equally bound by it, their power and procedure definitely restricted; above and beyond, the domain of ecclesiastical authorities is clearly outlined and fixed in canon law. The religious may thus remove to the ends of the earth without apprehension; under the protecting wings of Christ's far flung Church, she is beyond the might of any fear to reach her. Her security, the price of her sacrifices, goes before her and girdles the place of her sojourn even in the very wilds of Africa. Can it then never be attacked? Not justly nor rightfully and not without a body blow at the entire organization itself of which she is a part.

This fact explains the fear and uneasiness with which the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods regarded any attempt to disregard or change the Rule they had brought with them from France. Despite its ancillary character, security is of the bedrock of a religious order's existence in foreign or any other lands. Their Constitutions tampered with, morale at once begins to crumble. For this reason after Mother Theodore's deposi-

tion an unseen current of fear began its paralyzing activity at Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The sensitive soul of Sister Saint Francis Xavier was crushed by it as she was evidently fated to suffer most from it. Sister Basilide's resolution was taken. She would return to France, and Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer had expressed herself similarly earlier when Mother Theodore's death was thought to be imminent. The oldest of the first group and named assistant by Mother Mary, she would naturally be expected to replace Mother Theodore, but she herself had never been willing to accept this responsible position. Without Mother Theodore they could not therefore go on. Small wonder that Sister Saint Francis had need of all her faith and trust to look out upon their threatening future.

Mother Theodore was in Brittany when some time in August the story of the troubles into which the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had fallen in her absence reached France. As the only address to which letters could be sent to her from America was Ruillé-sur-Loir, it was probably only some weeks later that she learned of the Bishop's visit to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods early in July and of all that took place at that time. Of her deposition by the Bishop and the events of the epoch of the retreat she did not know till many weeks later. In the meantime she had left, as Sister Basilide wrote, "that Anjou where you went first and experienced so many humiliations," and we next hear of her at Rennes. Her credential letter and the alms contributed by Bishop Saint-Marc, who had succeeded her old friend Bishop de Lesquen on his retirement from the See of Rennes, are dated August 3, 1843.

A similar letter from Right Reverend Jacques-Jean-Pierre de Mée, Bishop of her native diocese of Saint Brieuc in Brittany, is dated August 29, 1843, and at the same time Mother Theodore was for a few hours among her sister Jeanne's family at Etables, three of whom, her nieces, were destined to follow her to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Once more she looked upon the rocky shore and the restless Atlantic, which had cradled her youth, and again she knelt in the old church where she had made her First Communion. Her sister's children listened with rapt attention to their aunt's details of the far away convent in the Indiana forest. Marie-Thérèse, the eldest, was then sixteen years of age. A few years later, in 1846, she entered the novitiate at Ruillé-sur-Loir, where she received the religious name of Sister Mary Theodore. After eight years as a Sister of Providence in France, she came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1854 and spent almost half a century of devoted labor in Indiana, long as superior of the orphan asylum at Highland, Vincennes. After a few years spent in retirement at the motherhouse she passed away November 19, 1901.

In early September Mother Theodore was again in Rennes, and in mid-September she returned to Ruillé, where the annual retreat would necessitate the presence of the Superiors and the ceremonies of profession and reception would require Bishop Bouvier to officiate at its close. This was a rendezvous for the final interview and decisions regarding the difficulties and ultimate procedure at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Mother Mary's determination, taken much earlier, to separate the Indiana foundation from the motherhouse at Ruillé-sur-Loir was now made definitive

and irrevocable, despite Mother Theodore's entreaties and the grief and consternation of the French Sisters in America. No additional Sisters were to be sent to Indiana, and Mother Theodore was forbidden to give any encouragement to Sister Saint Edmond, Sister Paule, or any others who might wish to join her. The jurisdictional details upon which she was uncertain were discussed and the decisions committing to writing, all with the valuable advice and approval of the Bishop of Le Mans.

On eleven fundamental questions, formulated probably on shipboard during the voyage to France, the superior general of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods sought enlightenment upon the relations of her Community with its parental house of Ruillé and with the Bishop of Vincennes. The first answers¹ reiterate the American Community's character of an independent, self-governing body with no claims upon the French house. The original Sisters have the right to return to Ruillé, but Ruillé may not recall them without the consent of the Bishop of Vincennes.

The sixth question enters at once upon the root of the difficulties in Indiana:

6. Is the Community of Saint Mary's to be modeled upon Ruillé or to be a foundation according to the views of the Bishop? Answer—The Sisters were given to his Lordship according to his request to form a Congregation like that of Ruillé in all that is possible, and it is the desire of the Bishop of Le Mans, the Ruillé Superiors, and especially of the Sisters of Saint Mary's that the Constitutions and Rules should be the same for both Congregations in all that is not absolutely impossible.

7. Can the changes found to be necessary be made by the Bishop of Vincennes without the participation of the Council at Saint Mary's? Answer—No, never; if Monseigneur commands, however, the Sisters must obey. The matter may be discussed later upon occasion.

8. May Monseigneur accept establishments and regulate the conditions without the consent of the Councils? Answer—No; these matters must be settled together.

The ninth answer denies to the Bishop the right to admit to vesture or profession a novice or postulant without the approval of the Council, though he may refuse one whom he considers detrimental.

To the tenth question regarding the Bishop's practice of placing and changing the Sisters, the brief answer is, "That is impossible." The last item is the visitation of the houses, which was in general disapproved by the Bishop, and the answer directs the superior to visit the establishments. "This is indispensable."

Every point of uncertainty was touched upon, and upon each the answer was clear, precise, unequivocal. Mother Theodore now knew her duty. The next three years were devoted to the heavy task of putting it into execution.

These important affairs decided, Mother Theodore hastened to Paris to pursue despite unfavorable circumstances her *quête*² in the capital of France, and Mother Mary wrote on September 23 from Ruillé to Sister Basilide the letter which, when shown in a moment of indiscretion by her to Bishop de la Hailandière, was destined to add so appreciably to the difficulties of the Indiana Sisters. The Bishop had been disappointed and

¹ Copy in Notre Dame University Archives.

² collection.

deeply offended when Mother Mary had kept Sister Saint Francis Xavier in France and then later sent her to America alone, despite the earlier promises to give additional Sisters if it proved to be necessary. This displeasure was partly responsible for his rooted determination to separate the American Sisters from the French motherhouse. He had ordered Mother Theodore to inspect the letters to the French Superiors from the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, although Mother Mary had written to beg him to allow the Sisters to continue to write confidentially to her. She now ordered her letter to Sister Basilide to be shown to the other Sisters and to Father Corbe, if they thought proper.

There was no mention of communicating its contents to Bishop de la Hailandière, although the tenor of a part at least of the letter suggests that the writer is addressing the Bishop of Vincennes:

I hope that notwithstanding the estrangement which the Bishop of Vincennes shows for Ruillé, which wishes him so well, which has proved it and will prove it again, he will not have reason to complain of the counsels we have given Sister Theodore, if they are reported as they were given, and above all if they are put into practice. No doubt the inexperience of your Bishop will cause him to make some mistakes in the administration of a congregation of women, but experience will correct all, for example, if he has appointed his priests to supervise the temporal affairs of the Sisters, the abuses and dangers of this measure will soon cause him to change his mind. Be at peace; it will be the same in regard to all the rest.³

This letter did not reach Saint Mary-of-the-Woods till mid-November. Despite the omission of any direct answer to her repeated requests to return to France, Sister Basilide seems to have been satisfied with its contents. "I am much pleased," wrote the Bishop, "that they wrote to you from Ruillé in a manner that quiets your mind." Referring to the separation of the two Communities, he continues, "No matter what might have been the answer that you expected, you know my mind was nevertheless made up. I could not have altered it."⁴ "From henceforth," wrote Sister Basilide to Mother Theodore, "he is more determined than ever to break off from Ruillé, that I may write it and tell it to whomever I please that he will not draw back before any difficulties."

Later however when of her own volition or at his request she showed him Mother Mary's letter, he was deeply offended that she had referred to him as a young and inexperienced Bishop, who made mistakes in the government of his diocese. He kept a copy of this unfortunate letter, and its phrases recur again and again in his later correspondence at crucial periods to add to the heaviness of the cross the Community had to bear. The orthodoxy of the principles it enunciated was called in question by no less an authority than Father Corbe, considered during his lifetime among the best moral and dogmatic theologians in the diocese of Vincennes, who wrote to Mother Theodore in 1846: "Oh, how imprudent was Sister B. when she gave that letter of your Mother Mary, a letter after all which has little common sense."⁵

It was largely to give pleasure to the Bishop of Vincennes then that

³ Mère Marie à Sister Basilide, 23 septembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁴ Bishop de la Hailandière à Sister Basilide, 3 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁵ 29 avril, 1846. S.M.W.A.

the separation of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from Ruillé was consummated in 1843, and Mother Theodore must have realized with a breaking heart that it was the will of their Divine Master that for the future she must lean upon Him alone. She saw herself deprived of every human aid. One friend and counsellor only, Bishop Bouvier, remained to her. From this time on to the culmination of their troubles in 1847, Mother Theodore turned more and more in her distress to him, and his charity and erudition and interest never failed her.

In the meantime the courageous Foundress was busily occupied in Paris. Sister Mary Cecilia accompanied her. They were housed with the hospitable Visitandines, "the excellent Ladies of the Visitation of the monastery founded by Saint Francis de Sales and his estimable co-operatrix. The spirit of the founders is perfectly preserved here, it is said, and one can readily believe it from what we see. The spirit of charity could hardly be carried further. We occupy the cells of the religious, are admitted to their choir, their refectory, their recreation, etc. . . . Thanks be to God and especially to the protection of our Blessed Mother, who loves us so much." ⁶ With the strange hatred of religion which animated them, the Revolutionists had given to the street where the Visitation convent was situated the unfortunate name Rue d'Enfer, but the Sisters of Providence were very happy there. The daughters of Saint Francis de Sales took an ardent interest in Mother Theodore's work, and continued to collect for her many months after she had left France.

Her success thus far had been however almost nil, and she was actually faced with the possibility of being forced to remain in France all winter through lack of funds to defray her passage to America. She also had some debts in Paris, among them the eight hundred francs for a supply of black goods, crucifixes, and chaplets purchased at the time when Bishop de la Hailandière was threatening to change the habit of the Community. Sister Basilide's list of commodities not easily obtainable in America also awaited purchase. Mother Theodore's prospects were anything but encouraging, but with her customary confidence in Divine Providence, she did not lose heart.

She had a number of letters of introduction to charitable and influential persons, some of them from the Marquis and Marquise de Brissac, whom she had met during her stay at Soulaïnes with M. de la Bertaudière. Her initial visit in the capital was to M. Choiselat, treasurer of the Association of the Propagation of the Faith, to whom she had written from Ruillé, and who received her at first favorably and recommended her to apply to the Council at Lyons. The rules of the society permitted separate allocations of funds to the religious orders of men, but an almost ironclad regulation forbade subsidies to orders of women. This ruling the officials were willing to waive in Mother Theodore's favor as Bishop Bouvier had written requesting special consideration for her. Father Chassé, refused at Paris, had obtained some weeks earlier through the director of the society at Lyons the sum of 20,000 francs for the diocese of Vincennes. On investigating the circumstances therefore, M. Choiselat withdrew his encouragement to Mother Theodore because the society had already taken her mis-

⁶ Mother Theodore à Mère Marie, 25 septembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

fortune into consideration in the allowance granted to Bishop de la Hailandière. Bishop Bouvier however used his influence again in her favor:

M. Choiselat writes me that in the memorandum on the needs of his diocese submitted by the Bishop of Vincennes to serve as a basis in the distribution of funds for the year 1843, the establishment of the Sisters of Providence figures for a considerable amount; he adds that the Council has taken this circumstance into consideration in the generous allocation made to Bishop de la Hailandière. Not only has M. Choiselat informed us here, but he has also written to you to the same effect in order that in case of necessity you may show his letter to Bishop de la Hailandière. From this allocation he is advancing to you the sum of five thousand francs. You are thus in a position to liquidate your debts at Paris and to make the necessary purchase. . . .

The choice of a season for a satisfactory collection could not truly, my child, be more unfortunate. All the persons of importance are in the provinces, and the greater number will not return till December. You ask whether you should remain in France during the winter in order to increase your funds. I hesitate to give you this advice as I fear that the prejudice to your establishments in America from so prolonged an absence will be greater than the advantages you might draw from a little more money. You seem to feel as I do. . . . Under the circumstances I counsel you to prepare to leave before the cold weather sets in. Two days ago I wrote to the Minister de la Marine urging him to grant or to obtain a free passage for you and your three companions. We will await his answer.⁷

This first notable contribution gave Mother Theodore means to settle her pecuniary affairs and make her purchases. Sister Mary Cecilia, who was now with her, had spent the summer at Le Mans and at Ruillé. While at the motherhouse, she had access to the Community archives and had prepared for the information of the American Sisters a brief biography of Mother du Roscoät and a history of the early years of the Congregation. Nostalgia for her own country now filled her mind. "My poor mother," she wrote a little later from Le Mans, "I believe it is useless to persevere in begging. Do finish what you have begun, and let us go home. I will await you with much impatience at Ruillé. I am so tired delaying our departure. . . . Come soon and let us embark for America. Let us go to our poor Sisters who languish for your return." Mother Theodore was almost of the same opinion. "I think I can truly say before God," she wrote to Ruillé, "that I have done what I could for our work, though without avail since it has not pleased Our Lord to bless my efforts. May His holy will be done. . . . They speak of doing something for us here next winter. We shall see. For myself I keep up my hope, but it is a hope founded on faith."⁸

All was not lost however, as the two travelers were tempted to believe. Divine Providence was preparing for them three devoted friends: an obscure young journalist, a princely and zealous prelate, and lastly a high born and charitable lady, none other than the last Queen of France, Marie-Amélie de Bourbon. The interest and exertions of these three friends eventually combined to lift Mother Theodore's failing *quête* in France to the proportions of a near triumph.

The second day of their stay in Paris a still more powerful Advocate

⁷ Msgr. Bouvier à Mother Theodore, 25 septembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁸ A Mère Marie, 25 septembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

deigned to take up their cause. The Visitation Convent was situated at a considerable distance from the center of Paris where their business took them. Hurrying on foot from place to place, they often passed the famous old baroque church built by Louis XIII during the Huguenot wars and named Our Lady of Victories to commemorate the capture of the Protestant stronghold of La Rochelle. Mother Theodore wished before leaving France to assist at Mass in this famous sanctuary and beg the protection of the Queen of Heaven. As they passed through the portal, at once the sights and sounds of the most brilliant capital in Europe dropped away, and they entered another world where the Immaculate Virgin, parting the veils that shroud her kingdom, has stretched forth her gracious hands, as so often before in France, to shower divine graces and favors upon her clients.

Making their way to the Lady Chapel of this celebrated shrine, they joined the heterogeneous throng of Mary's children who may be seen there at her feet at every hour of the day, young and old, nuns and fashionably dressed ladies, priests and professional men, market women with their baskets, young workwomen of the vicinity and pilgrims from distant lands. There in the soft glow of the waxen lights they experienced the strange and thrilling aura of love and confidence which pervades that sacred spot emphasized by the hundreds of ex-votos which catch the eye, the crutches and canes thrown away by cripples and the hearts and tablets with which the walls are lined, all with one reiterated theme, *Merci à Marie*, Thanks to Mary. All Mother Theodore's anxiety and sorrow were poured forth at Our Lady's feet. Was not the little Community in the Indiana forest doubly hers? It bore her name, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and no major activity had ever been undertaken there except under her patronage. Mother Theodore had already planned to associate her Community to the Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She describes the feelings which filled their hearts:

On entering the sanctuary where God causes the power of the Immaculate Mary to be manifested daily by the most striking prodigies, the soul is seized with an indefinable sentiment. One seems to feel something divine. Great concourses before the shrine of the Mother of Jesus indicated the place she occupies in this ancient spot.

When we entered, we saw a priest hearing confessions. It was the *curé*, that good Father Desgenettes, founder and director of the Archconfraternity. He had the charity to hear us also, and to promise to associate us, as a congregation, to the Archconfraternity. It was on this precious day that we became in a particular manner Children of Mary, that the Blessed Virgin deigned to take the poor children of the Woods of Indiana under her maternal protection. It was not long before we experienced the effects of this protection.⁹

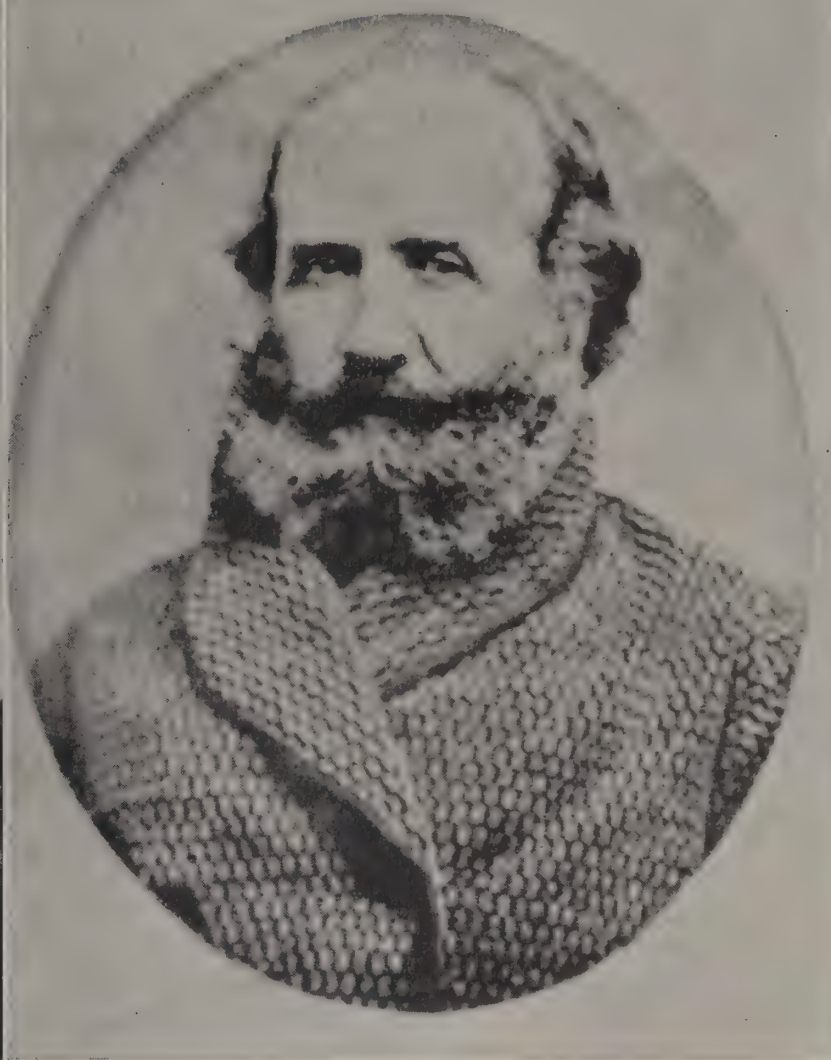
The Shrine of Our Lady of Victories is one of the glories of Catholic France. The *curé*, M. Charles Eléonor Dufriche des Genettes was one of those ardent and zealous priests formed to heroism during the perilous days of the Reign of Terror. He too sprang from the same old Plantagenet section of France as the Community of Ruillé. Named *curé* of the parish of Notre Dame des Victoires at Paris in 1832 during an epidemic of the cholera, he found the district buried in an ignorance and vice which resisted every effort of his zeal. One day during his Mass a voice resounded in the

⁹ *J. and L.*, p. 116.



from a Photograph in the Astor Library, New York City

SYLVIE PARMENTIER
1793-1882



Courtesy of the late George L. O'Brien, South Bend

SAMUEL BYERLEY
1796-1870

Shining in grateful remembrance for over a century at
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods are the names of Parmentier and Byerley.



Drawn by Sister Georgiana from Sister Maurice's Pencil Sketch

SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS FROM THE
TERRE HAUTE ROAD IN 1846

1. Chapel. 2. Mother Theodore's Room. 3. Refectory. 4. Dormitories.
5. Original Building. 6. First Log Chapel. 7. Bakery. 8. Kitchen.
9. Washhouse in the Ravine.



depths of his soul, "Consacre ta paroisse au très-saint et immaculé Cœur de Marie."¹⁰ Devotion to Mary was in eclipse at this time in France and elsewhere owing perhaps to the Jansenist and Gallican trend in the education of priests to be found in many of the seminaries of the time.¹¹ Beginning with the apparitions of the Miraculous Medal in 1830, however, the next thirty years witnessed torrents of graces poured forth upon France and the world largely through the Archconfraternity of the Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary, Refuge of Sinners, and culminating in the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and in the wonders of Lourdes. The Archconfraternity was extended to the entire world by Pope Gregory XVI in 1838, and its first dissemination through France was accomplished by the seminarians of Saint Sulpice during their vacation of 1839. The early days of 1842 saw the miraculous conversion at Rome of the young Jew Alphonse Ratisbonne. Mme. Le Fer had written of that remarkable occurrence to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Thenceforward the Confraternity became worldwide in its extent and influence and contributed powerfully to a renewal of faith everywhere. The days and even the nights of the saintly *curé*, M. des Genettes, were spent in his church at the altar or in the confessional where immense numbers of sinners returned to God. The two Sisters of Providence knelt near the very spot where he sat for his instructions and where today he lies buried. All the good works of the time found help and encouragement in the Church of Our Lady of Victories, especially the work of the missions. Mother Theodore was therefore at home there, and her friends and advocates, the editors of the *Univers*, also sought courage in their noble work from the Sacred and Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Sisters of Providence at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had the privilege of being among the first to contribute to the phenomenal spread of the confraternity in America, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier was in the vanguard of this excellent work. In one of her letters to her family she wrote:

I have had the happiness of contributing to propagate the devotion of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. When I passed through New York I lent the *Manual of the Archconfraternity* to Mme. Parmentier and explained to her the object of this excellent work. After having spoken of it to the parish priest, she wrote to Paris, and this year at last, on Assumption day, St. Paul's Church, in Brooklyn, had the privilege of celebrating the first solemn act in honor of the Heart of our Immaculate Mother. Mme. Parmentier tells me that nearly all the persons in the church associated themselves in the work and communicated for this intention.¹²

Mother Theodore had now a powerful Advocate, the Queen of Heaven. Both she and Sister Cecilia felt it in the courage and confidence which animated their hearts, and their Heavenly Mother was not slow to prove her goodness. Of the numerous letters of introduction, which they had brought with them and which they went from one end of Paris to another to deliver fruitlessly, as no one was at home, but one remained. It was addressed to Mlle. Labrousse at the Chancery. Mother Theodore felt the greatest repugnance to presenting herself there among the ministers of

¹⁰ Consecrate your parish to the most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary.

¹¹ Léon Aubineau, *Les Serviteurs de Dieu au XIX^e Siècle*, (Victor Palmi, Paris, 1875), p. 79.

¹² *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 240.

Louis Philippe. At Sister Mary Cecilia's urgent persuasion, however, she agreed to do so. On inquiring for Mlle. Labrousse they found her to be the governess of the children of M. Martin du Nord, Keeper of the Seals. She was not seemingly an influential or important personage, but she was generous and sympathetic. At her request the minister gave them an interview next morning and at once urged Mother Theodore to write to the Queen offering to deliver her letter himself.

King Louis Philippe, his Queen and their eight children, the sovereigns of the House of Orléans, one of the happiest and most united royal families in Europe, who had succeeded the Bourbon King Charles X at the Revolution of July, 1830, occupied the Tuileries but spent much of their time at Saint Cloud. There next day M. Martin du Nord presented Mother Theodore's letter to Queen Marie-Amélie, a simple request for an audience. "Ask for an audience, nothing more," had been his counsel. Not succeeding in seeing the Queen, he confided the precious letter to King Louis Philippe himself, who agreed to present it to Her Majesty. For a week they waited in vain from day to day for an answer. At last M. Martin du Nord became uneasy at the delay. On Saturday he sent for Mother Theodore and insisted upon her writing again. "I was obliged to improvise a letter on the Minister's desk," she writes. "It was quite unnecessary however, for on our return to the Visitation in the evening, the superior handed me a letter from the Queen. . . . She would leave Saint Cloud and repair to the Tuileries the next day at one o'clock to meet us there."¹³

Marie-Amélie de Bourbon, the last Queen of France, was a granddaughter of the Austrian Empress Maria-Theresa and a niece of the unfortunate Marie Antoinette, Queen of France. She was an Italian princess, her father the Spanish Bourbon King of the Two Sicilies, and she was betrothed in her childhood to Marie Antoinette's afflicted eldest son, the little Dauphin of France, who died at the opening of the French Revolution. Her early youth had been passed in the royal palace at Naples, but the unrest which convulsed Europe at this period drove the Spanish Bourbons twice from their capital. In 1809 she married her cousin Louis Philippe, the head of the House of Orléans, detested for participation in the Revolution. He was thirty-six and had spent years of poverty, wandering over Europe and America. An alliance with Marie-Amélie's family meant everything to him at the time. She was not beautiful, but her tact, her devotion to her husband and children, and her deep piety made their family life ideal. Louis Philippe's accession to the throne of France in 1830 was due to the powerful influence of his clever sister, Madame Adelaide and was greatly regretted by the Queen herself, who described their crown as one of thorns. When Mother Theodore met them in 1843, they were at the height of their prosperity, their court the most splendid in Europe, and the King acknowledged the first statesman of the day. The Queen's life was simple and devout. She rose early and after hearing Mass daily, devoted most of her time to the petitions for help which she received, every one of which she read herself, and to almsgiving in which she was lavish.

The day for the audience was auspicious, October 2, Mother Theo-

¹³ *J. and L.*, p. 118.

dore's forty-fifth birthday. When they passed the pillared entrance of the Tuileries palace, they learned that the Queen had already arrived and was awaiting them. A few minutes later Mother Theodore and her young half-Indian novice stood in the presence of "the greatest great lady in Europe." Tall and slender with small blue eyes, Marie-Amélie de Bourbon at sixty-one was nevertheless of distinguished and queenly presence. With the exquisite grace and tact which were habitual to her, she put her two visitors at once completely at their ease. She inquired about their circumstances and listened with sympathetic interest to Mother Theodore's story of her poor little Community in the backwoods of Indiana, their hardships and sorrows. Mother Theodore had a heart of oak before misfortune, but the Queen's tenderness after so many disappointments broke down her habitual reserve. Tears were running down her cheeks before she finished.

A kindred spirit of piety and zeal drew the missionary Foundress and the great Queen together. Mother Theodore was deeply edified at the Christian attitude of Marie-Amélie. "In a moment of holy exaltation, she said, 'Ah, yes, Sisters, let us save souls!' There was in her manner, her eyes, and above all in her voice, so intimate a conviction of the price of a soul that my heart was touched by it, and is so even yet in recalling the incident to my mind."¹⁴ Turning to Sister Mary Cecilia the Queen drew her into the conversation, exchanging a few words with her in English. Not satisfied with her promise to defray the ocean voyage of their party of four, she added, "But that is not enough; you will need something when you are in your Woods. I will solicit here for you, and the King and my children shall contribute. I will ask them for you." . . . "His Majesty now appeared, and we were presented. They then condescended to take us to see the royal chapel." While the Queen was speaking to Mother Theodore, His Majesty pointed out to Sister Mary Cecilia the Queen's confessional. "And yours also, Sire?" she inquired, unaware of the fact that Louis-Philippe like so many Frenchmen was not "pratiquant." He laughed, but did not answer. Louis-Philippe showed himself however all during his reign an open and consistent protector of the Catholic religion. "I am much pleased with King Louis Philippe," said Pope Gregory XVI. "I wish all the Kings of Europe were like him."¹⁵

After nearly an hour's interview with the Queen, the two Sisters took leave and went to the apartments of Madame Adelaide, the King's sister. She too was favorably impressed and desirous of helping them, but with her characteristically practical turn of mind, she quickly calculated the amount of their ocean voyage, which she thought was more than the Queen would be able to contribute owing to the numerous good works in which she was engaged. Later they learned from M. Martin du Nord that Madame Adelaide wished to confine the contribution of the royal family to five hundred francs, but the Queen, who had said, "To give is my only pleasure in the midst of all our troubles," replied, "No, sister, I promised Mother Theodore to pay her passage, and it shall be paid." Louis Philippe was well known to be one of the richest princes in Europe after the Orleans

¹⁴ *J. and L.*, p. 118.

¹⁵ C. C. Dyson: *The Life of Marie-Amélie* (Appleton, N. Y., 1910), p. 211.

estates were restored to him on Napoleon's downfall. He spent thousands of francs on rebuilding the royal palaces, and Marie-Amélie gave large sums every year in alms. Mr. Byerley at one time urged Mother Theodore to apply to the millionaire Louis Philippe for "some hundreds of thousands" for her struggling work in Indiana. But when the two Sisters left the Tuileries they were not sure on account of Madame Adelaide's reluctance that their passage would actually be paid by the Queen.

But these thoughts did not trouble us. The Queen had spoken sweet words which went straight to the heart, words consoling and strengthening, which poor solicitors seldom receive. How many times after having gone up and down stairs, climbing to the third and fourth stories, I wept in the streets before beginning another ascent to receive only a half franc with contempt! This time it had not been thus. My heart, full of gratitude, longed to go to the sanctuary of Mary Immaculate to thank her for having granted this day of consolation to us. Happy to be free, we went straightway to the church of Our Lady of Victories to pour out our hearts in tears of joy in the presence of our heavenly Protector and Mother.¹⁶

The kind Keeper of the Seals insisted upon Mother Theodore's writing letters to the King's Ministers, which he took to the Queen to present in person.

Thanks to the favor of the Queen, wrote Mother Theodore, we soon had that of several other persons. . . . A number of people of every station have shown such interest, such a desire for the prosperity of our work, and so many prayers have been offered and are still continuing that I doubt not God will bless this dear little Congregation, notwithstanding the trials He is pleased to send it. . . . The Archbishop of Paris granted permission to preach in favor of our work only at the recommendation of the Keeper of the Seals. It was the same with the Bishops of Orléans, Saint Briec, Rennes, and Versailles. The Archbishop of Tours evinced the deepest sympathy, and all gave unequivocal proofs of their generosity.¹⁷

Queen Marie-Amélie proved to be for them all that Mother Theodore's best hopes had foreseen. Not only was their passage paid to America, but the Queen sent a basket of eatables from her table and her portrait as a parting gift to Havre, and later through the French Embassy in Washington, Mother Theodore received the sum of fifteen hundred dollars from their royal benefactress. The small 12x24 portrait in oils, evidently a trial canvass for a projected life-size painting, is still preserved with honor at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. It shows the tall and stately Queen standing, dressed in an elaborate gown with deep lace flounces; a long lace scarf about her neck descends almost to her feet. Curls on each side of the face and a small coronet above shade her features, but the pose is one of quiet self-possession, a dignity which never failed this noble and saintly woman when only five years later the generous Orleans family were themselves on the road to exile.

Time was passing rapidly however, and Mother Theodore's prospects were not greatly improved.

You will be astonished to learn that we are yet at Paris, wrote Mother Theodore to Mother Mary early in October. As to myself I am distressed about it. Winter is almost here . . . Mr. Chassé leaves next Sunday. Here we are alone, and I have

¹⁶ *J. and L.*, p. 121.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

no news whatever from Vincennes. . . . The Bishop of Le Mans has written I do not know how many letters about our affairs. He is indeed very good . . . I am now starting for Orléans. I shall be obliged to return to Paris where I am leaving Sister. . . .¹⁸

At Orléans Mother Theodore had a devoted and capable friend in the Abbé Victor Pelletier, chaplain of the prison of Orléans, and a nephew of the veteran Kentucky and Indiana missionary priest, Stephen Theodore Badin. Abbé Pelletier was a successful preacher much sought after for the charity sermons then so much in vogue. Mother Theodore's days were filled during these weeks with correspondence and interviews to arrange the preachers and dates of the various sermons to be given for the benefit of her work. In this important and exacting labor, Abbé Pelletier was a faithful auxiliary. He himself was to speak at Orléans and at Le Mans, the eminent Jesuit Father Loriquet at Tours, and in Paris, Lacordaire, the celebrated orator of Notre Dame, then at the height of his fame. Almost all her early efforts, despite the greatest care and zeal in the arrangements, proved disappointing in their meager results. Tours in particular, where Mother Theodore had spent some days during the summer as the guest of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's aunt, the Baroness de la Valette, was a great disappointment.

I can say nothing to you of the generosity of our indifferent and opulent city, wrote the Baroness. As I had the pleasure of informing you, the Archbishop himself took charge of the details of your sermon and collection, and in truth, announcements, references to your interesting notices, nothing was overlooked in his sermon by Father Loriquet, who devoted himself to the work. The Archbishop had the collection taken up by a Canon and the Director of the Seminary, supporting it by an appeal from himself in favor of your work, but from what I have learned the result was insignificant.¹⁹

At Tours however Mother Theodore had met a devout young Catholic journalist, Léon Aubineau, then associated with the well known Catholic *littérateur* and apologist, Louis Veuillot, editor of the daily paper called the *Univers*, organ of the Catholic party in France. Aubineau had spent an evening in Mother Theodore's company at the home of Mme. de la Valette, where he was a frequent visitor. Printed in an early issue of *L'Univers*, the story of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, written by Aubineau, became known to readers all over Europe. The two articles as they came from the pen of her young friend appealed so much to the sympathy of M. Veuillot that he had five hundred copies printed as a small brochure, entitled "Sainte Marie-des-Bois," to be used as advance publicity by Mother Theodore for her charity sermons and sold for the benefit of her work. A union and an interchange of prayers followed upon this evidence of interest and charity on the part of the editors of the *Univers*. Aubineau was a zealous and devout young man. He recommended Mother Theodore's work to the members of the conference of Saint Vincent de Paul at Tours, and on her return to America, a steady stream of supplications from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods rose to heaven for the two noble French writers who were fighting so valiantly the battles of the Church in their day.

¹⁸ Mother Theodore à Mère Marie, 5 octobre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

¹⁹ Baronne de la Valette à Mother Theodore, n. d., 1843. S.M.W.A.

The editors of the *Univers*, Aubineau in particular, continued their active interest in Mother Theodore's work long after she left France. The manuscript known among her writings as her "Third Journal of Travel"²⁰ was a narrative of the dangerous return voyage on the *Nashville* to America, copied in Sister Saint Liguori's exquisite script and illustrated by aquarelles from nature painted by Sister Saint Francis Xavier. This, too, was sent by the Foundress to her friends in Paris and duly appeared in the columns of the *Univers*, thus keeping the needs of her work before the Catholics of France. To this means was no doubt due the constant flow of alms, which continued from France for four years after Mother Theodore's return to America.

Of Mother Theodore, her personality, her gifts and virtues, Léon Aubineau wrote in terms of extraordinary veneration:

Sister Theodore had embraced her mission with all the ardor of a great soul, a soul habituated to the contemplation of the splendors of the supernatural life. . . . At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods she attracted all hearts and lifted them up. She animated and vivified them. Over all who approached her she naturally exerted the power always manifested by superior minds. Religious humility seemed only to augment this ascendancy. In all her person there was an extraordinary charm. Her kindness captivated, while the rectitude of her judgment, the ardor of her words, the power of her virtue subjugated all who came into contact with her. No one knew her without loving her, and no one ever spoke with her without retaining an inexpressible impression. We saw her only once in 1843, when she was in France in search of alms; we are still as though it were the first day, under the charm of that exquisite eloquence, that grace and ineffable amiability, which superior to distinction and politeness, is the expansion and the brilliance of sanctity in a soul happily endowed.²¹

The data which had appeared first in the *Univers* and the Journal of her return voyage, to which the editors gave an equal publicity, however were always considered by Mother Theodore as largely responsible for the success of her voyage to France. To the end of her life her heart retained for the two Catholic editors a deep and inviolable attachment. Each time that some new catastrophe seemed to threaten the *Univers*, each time that dangers gathered round their work, always so thwarted, in which human resources remained so long precarious, a stream of prayers began to mount toward heaven from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Only a week before she was stricken with her last illness in a letter which has been kept with religious veneration as a relic, Mother Theodore wrote: "Continue to be steadfast. We share your labors and your struggles."²²

M. Aubineau thirty years later used the information obtained from Mother Theodore in 1843, her *Journal*, and some further details drawn from later letters and other sources as material for a chapter in his octavo collection of biographies published in Paris in 1875 under the title *Les Serviteurs de Dieu au XIX^e Siècle*. Among chapters on the Curé of Ars, M. des Genettes, the celebrated Jesuit orator, Père de Ravignan, Marie-Eustelle Harpain, the saintly seamstress of the town of Saintes, and others,

²⁰ Printed in full in *Journals and Letters*, pp. 146-180.

²¹ Léon Aubineau, *Les Serviteurs de Dieu au XIX^e Siècle*, p. 346.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 356.

there is one entitled, "Sainte Marie-des-Bois," illustrated with full page wood cut reproductions of the water color paintings of the log chapel and the convent of 1843 by Sister Saint Francis Xavier, sent to the editors of the *Univers* thirty years before on the manuscript of Mother Theodore's "Third Journal of Travel." In the preface of the 1846 edition of Aubineau's brochure, published in Paris by Lecoffre for the benefit of the Community, which contained Mother Theodore's "Third Journal of Travel," Aubineau wrote:

When this letter first appeared in the columns of the *Univers*, people were surprised that a woman whose humble vocation was to care for the sick, to visit the poor, and to teach little children, could write these noble and admirable pages. . . . The firmness of the style, the magnificence of the descriptions, and especially the strength of heart and great courage exert an irresistible attraction. . . . It will be asked how so much talent falls to the lot of a woman devoted to such occupations, and it will be forgotten that . . . the Sisters of Providence have begun one of those undertakings for which God gives special privileges of courage, that His grace always adds to the strength and charm of nature when it follows the divine law, that eloquence flows much more from a generous heart than a learned head and speech is always harmonious when it follows ardent convictions. . . . We had the happiness of seeing Sister Theodore but once and for the last time, no doubt, in this world. In the long and charming conversation which this worthy religious at that time did us the honor to grant us, we had no other thought than to satisfy a natural curiosity aroused by the beautiful recital which the grace and eloquence of her words . . . rendered still more attractive and engaging. We thought only of drawing from her all the details possible upon the manners of those peoples which she knew, the admirable heroes she had seen, and the works not less admirable upon which she was engaged. We did not in the least expect to become the historian of the community whose annals were related to us in so vivid a manner, and this excellent Sister, who knew us only from an accidental meeting in a Christian household, expected it even less than we.

The data from his chapter in *Les Serviteurs de Dieu au XIX^e Siècle* appeared also in English in somewhat amended form in a similar volume entitled *Heroines of Charity*, with a preface by the English Catholic poet Aubrey de Vere, published by D. and J. Sadlier, New York, its first chapter "The Sisters of Vincennes." In the 1880's the sketch was still in circulation in the United States issued by the same firm as part of a volume made up of selections of Catholic biography and fiction which had been published separately in the 1860's and 70's. As Aubineau had said, the angels multiplied the effects of his first charitable venture in the *Univers* in 1843.

In 1879 when Sister Saint Francis Xavier's youngest sister, Clementine de la Corbinière née Le Fer de la Motte, published her exquisite life of her sister under the title *Une Femme Apôtre*, which was so widely read and appreciated in France, she asked M. Aubineau to write the introduction. His contribution later appeared in translation in the English version of the book, *An Apostolic Woman*, published in 1882 under the auspices of the Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Second only to Léon Aubineau in the grateful remembrances of the Sisters of Providence at this time was the Prince Bishop of Nancy and Toul, and Primate of Lorraine, Monseigneur Charles de Forbin-Janson. Exiled by the French government, he had traveled extensively in the

United States and Canada, preaching and giving retreats and missions everywhere. When Bishop de la Hailandière returned to Vincennes from a tour of the northern missions in 1840²³ he found Mgr. de Nancy, as he called him, engaged in giving a retreat to the French people of the town. He was accompanied by the Mercedarian superior, Father Dominic F. Bach, who was contemplating founding colleges of his order at New Albany and on the present site of Notre Dame University. Bishop Forbin-Janson had assisted him to purchase Spring Hill College, near Mobile, Alabama. During his stay in Indiana after a period of great missionary success among the French Catholics in Louisiana,²⁴ he laid the cornerstone in Evansville of Father Deydier's new church of the Assumption. Passing through New York on his way back to Europe in 1841 he founded the French church of Saint Vincent de Paul, for his fellow countrymen. All during his tour in America he was in search of a good work to which he could most advantageously devote his great wealth. He eventually decided upon the Chinese missions, and when Mother Theodore met him in Paris, he had just founded the Association of the Holy Childhood to which he devoted this last year of his life, for he died very suddenly at his ancestral castle near Marseilles in 1844.

During Mother Theodore's stay in Paris Bishop Forbin-Janson was a kind and tender father to the two Sisters of Providence. They were always welcome at his house and his table. They were not women, he told the members of his household, but angels, and he insisted upon placing his carriage at Mother Theodore's disposal for her endless journeys to and fro in Paris. He charged himself with the charity sermon to be given for her there, and eventually officiated at the Church of Saint Roch on February 10, 1844, when the Archbishop of Bordeaux preached at a time when Mother Theodore had already arrived in America. He was greatly in favor of her remaining another two months in France, but promised to take charge of everything in case she would be obliged to leave. "You may be at ease," he wrote, "to leave or remain as seems most expedient for your affairs. . . . If your prolonged absence would cause to your establishment in America spiritual losses difficult to repair, perhaps it would be better to leave in a week or so and let me finish up in your name. I will do my very best."²⁵

Mother Theodore had been very much discouraged during her first weeks in Paris in September, but after her visit to Our Lady of Victories and her audience with the Queen, the horizon had begun to change. She now had every reason for encouragement. Madame Le Fer de la Motte and her family at Saint-Servan had followed every phase of her *quête* with the deepest interest. They too had heard of her recent success, and Cécile Le Fer, one of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's younger sisters, wrote facetiously congratulating her upon the change in her fortunes:

How many times am I to be obliged to say good-bye to you? I was telling Maman yesterday that all this was killing me. Oh, I am in great haste, not for you to leave, but for you to be at home. What a season to travel and in your poor health!

²³ Mgr. de la Hailandière à M. Martin, 6 août, 1840. S.M.W.A.

²⁴ L. J. Kenny, *The Torch on the Hill* (America Press, New York, 1931), p. 102.

²⁵ Mgr. de Nancy et Toul à Mother Theodore, 8 novembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

Seasickness will put you in a dreadful state. I am already ill in your stead. I seem to feel the *mal de mer*. I know not to what saint to address myself for a novena that you may not be ill.

Irma will have a pretty sermon to preach to you on your return from all this worldly life. What pride! to be spoken of in all the newspapers, in the *Univers*, and what is more, in the young ladies' journals where it is question of little else than styles and frivolities. Not however in your case. They did make a pompous tribute to Sister Mary Cecilia, but of Sister Theodore something entirely different. They spoke of her elegant appearance, her expressive glance. I thought that you probably were not wearing your spectacles. They saw you in all your splendor. They say you made the Queen weep, that she kissed you. . . .

That I am told is what was in the *Journal des Demoiselles*. I am to receive the article to read for myself tomorrow. You had the modesty not to tell us all your success; we must learn it from the public prints. It seems that I had very good taste in loving you. I am quite proud of it, but I will not be if you love all these grand people more than me. When you have returned to your beloved Sisters, do not forget your daughter Cécile.²⁶

A letter from Sister Saint Francis Xavier's mother, Mme. Le Fer de la Motte, at Saint-Servan, written on October 21 told Mother Theodore with what anxious interest the family were following her varying fortunes in Paris:

How much good your letter received a few days ago did to my heart. Your long silence was beginning to make me very uneasy. I was preparing to write to Mr. Sevin²⁷ to ask what had become of you. Your last letter, you know, was very alarming and left us in great anxiety on your account. I see however that God has had pity on his generous daughters. He has heard your desires and your prayers, and has sent you that kind and zealous missionary, the Bishop of Nancy, who has himself been to Vincennes and knows Monseigneur La Hélandière [sic] and who shows such tender interest in your work. God will bless his words, I hope, and you will feel the effects.

You had a cruel disappointment, dear Sister, when the Propagation of the Faith refused to help you. It is however when we think all is lost that Providence comes to our assistance in an almost visible manner as though God spoke to us, "It is I alone who am rescuing you and no human arm. You called upon Me. I have come to your help." Yes, my dear Sister, I thank this God of goodness with all my heart, and I see more than ever how just and reasonable is my dear Irma's boundless confidence in Providence. How she must have prayed for the success of your voyage! You must cherish this peace and this sweet confidence in Providence, that God will sustain your establishment and that you will all contribute to the glory of God and the sanctification of souls. I am now convinced of it, but I was, I acknowledge, very uneasy. Why have I not our dear child's abandonment, her complete confidence. "It is impossible," she said in one of her letters to us, "that to this entire trust God can refuse anything."

I would like some details about you. If I could do so, I would go for them to Rennes, to say also a goodbye which would be, I confess, very painful though consoling also. . . . I beg of you then, write to me from Rennes. Tell me what your actual resources are and your expectations, if you are taking any novices with you, how many and from what localities. You may imagine how deeply all that will interest me.

²⁶ Corbinière, *L'Indiana, Suite d'une Femme Apôtre* (Victor Lecoffre, Paris, 1886), pp. 173-4.

²⁷ A devoted priest at Rennes who interested himself in Mother Theodore's work.

Mme. Le Fer concludes her letter by detailing the different items she is sending her daughter and the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods: woollens and shoes for Irma, patterns and drawing pencils, scissors, knives, needles, and woolen hose for the cold American winters. The money she has gathered from friends she handed over to Sister Marie-Anne,²⁸ the superior at Saint-Servan, who was one of Mother Theodore's bankers.

The intense activity of these weeks might have continued during the remainder of the autumn and winter but for an event which changed all Mother Theodore's plans, the arrival in France of letters bringing news of the occurrences which had taken place at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at the retreat in August, her deposition and reelection and the admission of Sisters to profession and to the novitiate without the consent of the Community. Mother Mary, who had always felt that Sister Theodore would be able to manage alone and who did not hesitate to cut the Indiana Community loose from France in their hour of greatest need, was now genuinely alarmed and wrote to her in Paris, ordering her to lose no time in embarking at once for America:

I continue to think that your presence is of absolute necessity at Saint Mary's and that all the gold in France could not repay you for the injury which your absence may cause to the spiritual good of your rising community. Provide yourself with a good measure of protection at the feet of the Immaculate Virgin at Our Lady of Victories in order to go forth to endure a combat with no other arms than humility, meekness, and constancy of heart. . . . Ask all these graces of our good Mother before leaving the place where she loves to distribute her favors . . . Make haste, my dear Theodore, fly to Vincennes to repair the damage. . . . Though your return to France has been useful, your presence at home is still more necessary.²⁹

Although Mother Mary's letter was sent to Mother Theodore in Paris, she did not receive it till the middle of November owing to her absence from the city. The first week of October, as we have seen, she was at Orléans arranging with Abbé Pelletier details of the charity sermon to be given there. Later in the month she was at Rennes, at Angers, and Tours for the same purpose. While in the vicinity of Angers she paid a last visit to Soulaines to consult and thank her benefactor, M. Perrault de la Bertaudière. On this occasion he contributed again, despite the generous sums he had already given to her work. The poor peasants whom she knew and had cared for flocked to meet her. She said goodbye and knelt for a last time in the stately church with its beautiful marbles and rich gilding, which M. de la Bertaudière had given to Soulaines at her request. These adieux were final, for she knew that not again within human probability could she return to France. Early in November she was at Le Mans. Bishop Bouvier had invited her. The Queen had counseled appealing to the Bishops, especially to the Bishop of Le Mans. He did not however give permission for a charity sermon, which he considered futile at that time, but urged her to visit his episcopal city during a bazaar to be held the first week in November when he hoped to do something for her work.

On November 19 she was back in Paris, and then only did she receive

²⁸ Sister Marie-Anne and her sister, Sister Saint-Eloi, were among Mother Theodore's faithful correspondents in France. The former was one of the last postulants received at Ruillé by Mother du Roscoät.

²⁹ Mère Marie à Mother Theodore, 16 octobre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

Mother Mary's letter of October 16 ordering her to leave for America immediately.

I have found here a letter from you written in October which leaves me in no doubt whatever about your desire that I should leave at once. . . . I have not seen dear Mother Saint Charles nor Sister Eudoxie. My heart suffers because of this; it is hard to accustom it to find, to taste only the cross.

Of the uncertain state in which she must leave her affairs, she wrote:

Our business of Tours has not progressed so well at Paris and Orléans; it is dragging on. The Bishop of Nancy promises to preach in a month. The Reverend Father Lacordaire has assured me that he will speak at Orléans on the twenty-eighth of January, but one should be on hand to see that it is done. God does not wish it; may His holy will be done! I have seen Mme. Martin. She will solicit for us, she says, tomorrow. I will see her husband and the Queen's secretary. We have spent some of our time at the Bishop of Nancy's house. He continues his great kindness to us.⁸⁰

From now on, all her energies were bent toward winding matters up in view of sailing at the earliest opportunity. Bishop Bouvier had advised her to leave two months earlier immediately after he secured for her the grant of six thousand francs from the Propagation of the Faith, but after her visit to the Queen, she remained for some time in doubt if and when her ocean passage would be paid. Circumstances over which she had no control having thus detained her beyond the original time set for her departure, prudence would seem to dictate a somewhat longer stay as inevitable. Her friends were astounded at the decision to send her forth in her delicate state of health to the dangers and suffering of the winter Atlantic. Leaving France at the end of November would bring the travelers upon the sea during two of the worst and stormiest months for ocean travel, December and January. This was what had been feared for Mother Theodore at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. "You will freeze to death on the ocean," wrote Sister Basilide, "unless you take a steamer."⁸¹ Passenger steamships were now plying regularly between Havre and New York, but Mother Theodore though the Queen had paid their passage, never thought of availing herself of the luxury of rapid travel.

Working feverishly she planned to leave Paris immediately. Her prospects were now so good that Bishop de Forbin-Janson used every argument to induce her to remain.

Tell me, my daughter in Our Lord, he wrote, what the result was of our little ministerial conspiracy against your precipitate departure for New Orleans, where you will spend the winter without advantage to your work, whereas two more months of endeavor in our old France would bring you a satisfactory harvest! . . . At what hour do you start? If you go, it seems to me you could wait a day or two without inconvenience. I consider it very probable that you will receive an authorization to remain two months longer. Kindly answer with one word by the return of the carriage. I shall say my Mass in one hour, that is at nine precisely.

Your very humble servant and father,

CHARLES, *Bishop of Nancy*.⁸²

⁸⁰ A Mère Marie, 19 novembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁸¹ Sister Basilide à Mother Theodore, 8 septembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁸² 20 novembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

In deference to this kind friend's wishes, Mother Theodore did remain two days longer in Paris, and though she was now a rightfully constituted superior general of an independent Community, Mother Mary continued to exercise jurisdiction from time to time, and Mother Theodore never failed to bow to her decisions. Accordingly she never thought on this occasion of going counter to her wishes. The party was to consist in all of six persons. Sister Saint Liguori's former parish priest at Fougères, Father Hardy, was sending a young girl, Julienne Cheminant, whom he had intended for Father Bellier to augment the group of domestics at Saint Gabriel's College in Vincennes. She had preferred, however, to join Mother Theodore and would meet her on the way to Havre. Mother Mary had recommended a young girl from the vicinity of Rennes, Marie-Thérèse Delahaye, especially as her brother Jean, an experienced gardener, was willing to accompany her to enter the service of the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. A third postulant, Louise Tiennoux from Saint-Servan, afterwards Sister Monique, was also to join the party. Mother Theodore had left Sister Mary Cecilia at Le Mans during this last flying visit to Paris, and she too was to meet them en route.

Everything had been arranged by Mother Theodore with her usual ability. Canon Lottin, her old friend at Le Mans, was to be her treasurer. All funds were to be deposited with him to be placed at interest. The Bishop of Nancy, the editors of *L'Univers*, Mother Mary Gertrude Chappon, superior of their hospitable hostesses, the Visitandines of Rue d'Enfer in Paris, and several Sisters of Mother Theodore's own Community in different places were to continue collecting, and Abbé Pelletier at Orléans was to see to the different sermons.

The little colony reached Havre on November 23, and their ship, the *Nashville*, was booked to sail two days later. Their five trunks, sent on nine days earlier, were missing, and they were without linen sufficient for the voyage. Their vessel, an old sailing ship, seemed hardly seaworthy, "badly built and uncomfortable," as Sister Mary Cecilia described it to Mother Mary. "We are looking forward to a disagreeable voyage."³³ Writing on the same date to M. Lottin at Le Mans, she thanks him for a treasured relic bestowed upon them as a safeguard for their dangerous journey, a piece of the True Cross. She signs herself their respectful and devoted "O-da-wa-quæ" which she explains is the feminine form of Ottawa.³⁴ Unfavorable weather kept the *Nashville* in the port of Havre for nearly a week. Mother Theodore must have been apprehensive at the sight of their poor vessel and the frightful sea, but her courage and resignation never faltered.

HAVRE, November 28, 1843

MY GOOD MOTHER,

You will be astonished to learn that we are yet at Havre. The sea is frightful, even to an American. The ships that left Havre lately were obliged to put in on the coast of England, to which the storms had driven them. The Bishop of Cincinnati being in one of those ships had to take a steamer to Liverpool. One arrived here Saturday which foundered in the port. They were obliged to unload it Sunday to save some of the cargo.

³³ Sister Mary Cecilia à Mère Marie, 27 novembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ Sister Mary Cecilia à M. Lottin, 27 novembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

Notwithstanding all this, the little *Nashville* has just left the dock. Everybody was amazed on seeing the captain prepare to start so soon in such weather. All our baggage is aboard. We are awaiting word from the captain, who will send for us at the time of departure. We are six, including the little maid from St. Servan and the domestic for Father Bellier. Everybody felt doomed; but prepared to perish, if it must be, but to persevere to the end. The Lord will be touched by their devotedness. All went to confession and received Communion for the last time here; so, adieu, Mother, adieu, Sisters. With all my heart I thank all those who have done me any good. God will recompense them; for He will have pity on those who are little and lowly, and what is done for them He will consider as done to Himself. I ask pardon also for anything that I have done or said that could give pain to anyone of you. And if in that supreme moment when all illusions vanish in the pale glimmer of the taper in one's agony there would be found among you anyone who might think she had something with which to reproach herself in my regard, let her be assured that I pardon her with all my soul. I am even ashamed to say this, for who has not the right to offend her who has been so audacious as to offend God and who yet offends Him daily? May this God of love cover with His mercy the multitude of my iniquities and one day reunite us in heaven to bless Him and love Him together, and to love one another in Him. . . .

The ship is full of passengers, and ladies nearly fill the room. I think they are French, but I have not spoken to them. The captain is reserved like all Americans, but he has some feeling. He had me put our trunks on the boat this evening at a time which was quite inconvenient for him.

Our affairs are all settled. The Queen has paid the passage for all our party. May God reward her! All the boxes except those from Nantes have arrived. We have a great deal of baggage. . . .

Adieu, my good Mother St. Charles. I have suffered much in not having seen you, but I see you and shall always see you in the Heart of Jesus. There I place all those who are dear to me. Pray for a soul whom Jesus has redeemed and who loves you. Pray for our poor House in the Woods where the cross of our Saviour is found in its integrity. Once more, adieu.

Dear Sister Eudoxie, you were not willing to delay your trip for a few hours. I understand it—you were going to Ruillé where your presence was so greatly desired. Receive my farewell from here.³⁵

Contrary winds detained the *Nashville* five days in the English Channel, but during the first days out the weather, though very cold, was calm and favorable. Eventually their crossing proved to be all but a catastrophe. A week's experience of a continuous storm, which all but sank the poor *Nashville*, was the never-to-be-forgotten memory of this dreadful trip. For entire days, during nights of pandemonium among the passengers, they were in momentary danger of shipwreck. Prayer was their refuge. Everything on the deck was carried away by the waves, and finally on the night of December 21, the ship actually capsized. The waves rushed in on all sides and but for a contrary wind which miraculously arose and righted the vessel immediately, they would have been engulfed. A merciful God had saved them. After two months of frightful sufferings of mind and body they reached the mouth of the Mississippi on the twenty-fourth of January.

At last we are at the river, wrote Mother Theodore to Ruillé. Half an hour ago a steamer came to take us in tow. The dangers of the sea are over, and those dangers

³⁵ A Mère Marie. S.M.W.A.

have been great. We had a very stormy crossing. During the eight weeks that we were on the ocean we had forty days of very bad weather, almost always stormy. One week was frightful. The sailors say that never in all their lives had they seen the like. The storm began on the fourth Sunday of Advent about two o'clock in the morning, and did not cease until the following Saturday morning, diminishing a few moments occasionally only to begin again with greater fury. Our capstan was carried off; the porthole frames, the shallop, everything was swept overboard. The main-yard broke in two, and only an hour earlier our twelve sailors and an officer had come down from it. Finally the ship was turned over by the waves at three o'clock in the morning, the night of the twenty-first to the twenty-second. The water poured in at a thousand places at once. It was all over for us, if the Lord had not come to our assistance. Quick as lightning, the Captain said, the wind which blew a gale from the southwest veered to the northwest and sent an enormous wave which set our ship upright again. The tempest continued twenty-one hours longer, but we were no longer terrified, for the gifts of God are without repentance.

We prayed much during that week of watchings and inexpressible suffering. We promised firmly to belong entirely to God. We made some vows; but especially did we invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St. Anne, her august mother. It is to Mary we owe our preservation. I am going to write to Father Desgenettes that he may thank the Heart of Mary. That was one of our promises; another pertains to you, which we pray you to fulfill. It is this: that you will have a Mass said in thanksgiving in honor of the Blessed Virgin, at which our Sisters of Ruillé will receive Holy Communion for the same intention.

We pray you all, our good Mothers and dear Sisters, to obtain the grace for us from our Lord that these lives which He has spared may be employed in serving Him with fidelity and love.

I ask you to offer our homage of respect to Madame the Countess de Marescot. I have a little Chinese basket for her which I shall send if she will be so good as to accept it.

I thank the priests of Ruillé for their charity in offering the Holy Sacrifice for us. Undoubtedly we owe our preservation to the prayers that were offered for us.

Sister Mary Cecilia offers you her respects and thanks. She suffered greatly. We were almost as ill in the gulf as in the channel, and worse on the high seas. There is plenty of life in a worn-out body when God sustains it.

Since I began writing we have cast anchor. The fog is so thick that it is not possible to ascend the river. The Mississippi is a beautiful stream, though we can see but little of it. A countless number of pelicans are flying around us. Yesterday we saw dolphins sporting on the waves. The day before we saw hundreds of flying fish, et cetera.

I must stop now. My letter will be mailed at New Orleans still forty-five leagues distant.³⁸

Mother Theodore's "Third Journal," written for her friends MM. Veillot and Aubineau and sent to them later, gives in specific detail the dreadful scenes on shipboard during the storm when the fear-crazed passengers were as great a danger as the frightful sea. The Way of the Cross followed devoutly over and over again at those terrible hours at dead of night when every word seemed about to be their last, gave to the Sisters the calm and resignation with which with Mary at the foot of the Cross, they made again and again the sacrifice of their lives.

Mother Theodore herself was the means of rescuing the passengers from almost as great a danger as shipwreck but of a different sort. To-

³⁸ 27 janvier, 1844. S.M.W.A.

ward the end of the voyage when the *Nashville* was nearing the West Indies, the captain had overexerted himself in subduing an intoxicated sailor and sank upon the deck unconscious and inert, the dark flush upon his countenance indicating apoplexy. No physician was on board, the first mate was inexperienced, night was falling, and the ship was approaching the Bahamas, where the dangerous reefs would require all the captain's careful seamanship. Consternation reigned on board till Mother Theodore stepped quietly forward saying that the sick man should be bled. Producing her lancet, she asked for some necessities and proceeded to perform the operation. The captain opened his eyes, and in a few moments was able to speak. "I feel so relieved," he said, and after three or four hours he was able to go on deck.³⁷

The ordinary route of vessels for New Orleans passed north of Cuba, but the captain avoided this passage with its dangerous currents on account of the disabled condition of the ship. On New Year's day the yard-arm of the main mast broke off two hours after the entire crew of twelve sailors had gone up on it in an attempt to reef the sail. Sailing southwest toward Santo Domingo, and past Puerto Rico, and the Windward Islands the ship on January 2 crossed the equator off the mouth of the Amazon amid stifling heat. Provisions on shipboard were becoming frightfully low, but the captain was now steering north again, and on January 19 they sailed past Tortuga and Cuba, admiring daily the beautiful panorama of tropical sky and sea. One of the passengers on this disastrous voyage was indebted to Mother Theodore for care and consolation in his last moments. He was a New Yorker accompanied by his wife, and during their first night on board his repeated cough audible all night from a distant state-room led Mother Theodore to remark that he was in the last stages of consumption, as it was then called, and would not survive the voyage.³⁸ He expired in sight of New Orleans with Mother Theodore alone at his bedside, his wife having fled in fear from the sight of death. The steerage passengers, a riotous and intemperate group, stood respectfully in a double rank to observe her when she went below to visit and attend upon the sick. She had the happiness of baptizing a new-born infant, but another child of eight was buried at sea, having died of fright or starvation, as the sea had carried off the cooking utensils of some of the steerage passengers. Worn out though she was by months of anxiety and toil, her kind and charitable heart caused her to seek out sorrow and suffering to alleviate even among her fellow passengers of a few weeks on the stormy ocean.

In their dire extremity they threw into the sea their most precious medals, and Mother Theodore as a true Breton turned to Saint Anne, long the protection of the Breton mariners upon this very same wild Atlantic, which was now threatening to engulf the poor old *Nashville*. In that dark hour of peril Mother Theodore vowed to have special prayers of thanksgiving recited by all the Sisters, and to build a shrine to Saint Anne to which the entire Community would repair yearly in solemn procession of thanksgiving on the eve of the feast, July 26. At that midnight

³⁷ Mother Mary Cecilia's MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

hour on the stormy Atlantic was born the Community devotion to Saint Anne.

When they arrived in New Orleans on Saturday, January 27, Most Reverend Antoine Blanc received the weary travelers with great kindness, and they were offered gracious hospitality by the Ursuline nuns, the first religious women to open schools within the present boundaries of the United States. At this convent they found their old friend, Abbé Perché installed as chaplain. Their hearts were at home immediately in the Catholic land of Louisiana where the cross dominated every cemetery and spoke from every church spire. Only three years earlier their benefactor, Bishop de Forbin-Janson had been there, his preaching bringing the people back to the practice of their religious duties in crowds.

Mother Theodore's frail strength was now however completely exhausted. On Sunday morning she was seized during Mass with a violent attack of illness, not the dreaded yellow fever, but one of those wasting and malignant fevers which were for so many years the curse of the South. Letters from Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Basilide filled with disquieting details were awaiting her. After about ten days, seeing that her illness would probably lengthen into many weeks, with her customary consideration for her hostesses, she sent Sister Mary Cecilia on to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods with the rest of her party keeping only one of the postulants to assist in caring for her. A few lines traced with difficulty on February 6 sent news of her condition to Ruillé:

My dear Mother, I am finishing this letter at the convent of the Ursulines where I have been sick for ten days. It looks as if this attack might last a long time, for I am exhausted and can take very little nourishment. Not to overburden the house, I am compelled to separate from my dear Sister Mary Cecilia. She is going to set out with the other traveling companions for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and I shall have to remain here. I always find a new sacrifice to make when I think I have reached the end. May God be blest for it! In eternity it will not be too much. I am here the recipient of the most ingenious charity. It is said that this holy virtue, driven often from its own domains, finds refuge in the cloister; I am in the Sisters' infirmary. I wanted to go, although sick, but the doctor said it would be death for me before I was half way home.⁸⁹

For seven long, anxious weeks the harassed Foundress lay tortured with fever and nursed by the charitable Ursulines. As the long days wore away amid the beauties of the early Louisiana spring, she gradually gathered up day by day her wasted strength. At last she was able to go out for a drive, but the city of New Orleans did not impress her. The slave marts in particular roused in her compassionate heart the same sentiments of pity and indignation felt some years later by Lincoln when, an obscure passenger on an Indiana flat boat, he had seen this traffic in human beings. The Ursuline nuns had been established in New Orleans since 1727, well over a hundred years, but the famous convent built for them then, which was so closely linked with the history of New Orleans, had been abandoned in 1824 for a new location. It was in this second convent that Mother Theodore found hospitality from January 27, 1844 to mid-March. She found it spacious and beautiful.

⁸⁹ S.M.W.A.

The Ursulines have a magnificent house in New Orleans. It has two hundred columns and five hundred doors and windows. Nevertheless great as is the outward splendor of this Community, when I think of the virtues of those who dwell therein, I cannot but reflect that all the beauty of the King's daughters is from within. We have found a father and friend in their chaplain, Mr. Perché, who uses his distinguished talents in defense of the Church and in behalf of the Bishop of the diocese, now so unjustly persecuted.⁴⁰

Since 1841 shortly after his visit to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, when he left his French parish at Portland on the outskirts of Louisville, Kentucky, Father Perché had been laboring in New Orleans as editor of the recently established French weekly newspaper, *Le Propagateur Catholique*, which was the chief defense of the Church in Louisiana against trusteeism and the anti-Catholic sentiment which had penetrated even to Catholic New Orleans. Later in the same year of Mother Theodore's stay at the Ursuline Convent it was mobbed by malcontents and the office of Father Perché's paper also. He had a long career in Louisiana and nearly thirty years later became Archbishop of New Orleans and died in 1883.

⁴⁰ *J. and L.*, p. 164.

CHAPTER XIII

THE YEARS OF SORROW—II—1843-1847

SPIRITUAL CONSOLIDATION OF THE COMMUNITY

"Our Congregation has grown in the shadow of the cross which still covers it."

MOTHER THEODORE

BISHOP de la Hailandière's failure as an executive was nowhere more apparent or marked than at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. He loved Saint Mary's and sought refuge from his troubles in its quiet peace. He rejoiced in its rapid growth and contributed to its maintenance in a manner to hamper and cramp his own comfort. The Community was fervent and regular under the direction of a wise, saintly, and experienced superior. Wisdom would have counseled him to allow it to develop unmolested. During the first year of its existence in America this was his procedure. He was satisfied, even pleased, and seemed willing in the main to permit the Sisters to live quietly and peaceably in conformity with the Rule they had brought from France and which they had vowed to observe. During their second year in America, however, an unaccountable change took place, and at that time during the difficulties with Father Buteux began that long period of trial, "*les années de nos épreuves*,"¹ which ended not with his resignation in July but only with the Bishop's departure from the diocese in December, 1847.²

He was not experienced in the government of a religious Community, but he wished to take an active part in the spiritual, temporal, and even domestic administration at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. He seemed to feel that if he could succeed in developing and governing the Community according to his ideas, the burden of the episcopacy would not become more than he could bear. But even here failure and confusion attended his efforts. In every circumstance which he touched, the same lack of success appeared which followed his administration elsewhere in the diocese. He saw it and was almost the first to acknowledge it. During Mother Theodore's absence he wrote to Father Corbe, "I would not be surprised if in six weeks this house will be in a turmoil."³ If he undertook the special direction of a novice, she quickly gave up the religious life. If he chose to assist and train a particular Sister, her spiritual life and even her character disintegrated.

The novices he selected and practically forced upon the Community showed a spirit which made it hazardous to keep them, yet they had to be retained for months through fear of incurring his displeasure. He persuaded four Sisters of Charity to leave their Community and sent them to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, where he expected them to be ad-

¹ The years of our trials.

² December 16, 1847.

³ A. M. Corbe, 17 juillet, 1843. S.M.W.A.

mitted without any novitiate. When the Sisters of Providence took over the mission of Vincennes he selected as teachers, instead of the trained Sisters who were available, postulants without experience in teaching who quickly brought the school to the verge of ruin. In almost every other phase of his dealing with the Community the same fatality pursued him. None of his measures toward them, however, would have been so injurious, had it succeeded, as his endeavor to separate the superior from the Sisters. By this only one was affected and she not permanently, Sister Basilide. From 1840 till her trip to France in 1843 all Mother Theodore's humility and tact were necessary in dealing with him.

As long as he was willing to respect their manner of life and allow them to live a normal religious life, nothing else really mattered to her; but after he showed his intention to disregard their original organization completely, throw aside their Rule, and make them dependent solely upon his will or whim of the moment, they became seriously alarmed. Evidently a Community broken up into small detached groups made up almost entirely of young religious as yet imperfectly formed to the religious life, living without communication with their religious superiors, and completely separated from the motherhouse was destined to extinction. Could they or ought they continue to live in this manner? Were those Sisters who had vowed poverty, chastity, and obedience according to their Rule and Constitutions justified in undertaking another manner of life? These were the questions which insistently demanded an answer in Mother Theodore's mind during the year and a half preceding her voyage to France. Her duty in these delicate circumstances was not entirely clear to her, and for her own guidance and that of the Community she turned to her legitimate superiors in France. Both she and Sister Saint Francis Xavier were convinced that they could not continue to exist in this manner, and Bishop Bouvier, when consulted, was of the same opinion.

Religious Communities can change their rules to conform to the needs of a new country, but the religious life and spirit must be safeguarded. Otherwise failure is inevitable. If the Bishop of Vincennes had been a wise and successful administrator, the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods would no doubt have been confident to follow his wishes, and he would have observed the regular canonical procedure in rendering it possible for them to do so. They saw, however, very early that he could not continue and that the utmost prudence would be necessary to avoid the Community's being involved in his non-success. His resignation was said to have been designed to avoid the appointment of an administrator for the diocese.⁴

Already in 1843 the diocese of Vincennes was beset by the confusion and uneasiness which ordinarily mark the regime of an unsuccessful administrator. Criticism was rife both in Europe and in America. The Bishop had petitioned the Council of Baltimore in 1843 to allow him to retire, and the exodus of priests from the diocese had begun which eventually deprived it of some of its best and most talented ecclesiastics. Until Mother Theodore's departure for France, her tact and self-sacrifice kept the little Community together and gathered all the crosses into her

⁴ Rev. J. Vabret à Joseph Picquet, 22 février, 1846. Vincennes Old Cathedral Archives.

own heart, but when she was gone, trouble overtook them almost at once. Sister Saint Francis Xavier was not the experienced and skilled executive which the Community had known in Mother Theodore, but she was intelligent, upright, and completely devoted to the interests of God and the Community. Eventually she was destined to be a rock upon which their frail craft was almost wrecked.

Bishop de la Hailandière's displeasure was now open, not with the Community however as a whole, but with Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Francis Xavier. All his disapproval seemed concentrated upon them, and he had resolved to get rid of them. Hounded to death by his creditors and oppressed by the unrest in the diocese which weighed upon him at Vincennes, he escaped his worries and came to spend nearly a month at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods early in 1844. His brother and other correspondents in Europe had kept him informed of Mother Theodore's movements. He knew of her almost fruitless labors during her first months in France and of her later success in Paris, and he told Sister Basilide repeatedly that the Mother would not return till spring. For several reasons this month and the two which followed were crucial in the history of the Community. Mother Mary in sending Mother Theodore back to Indiana across the dangerous winter Atlantic thought and said that the situation was desperate, for the reason that Bishop de la Hailandière's manner of dealing with the Community was, in the opinion of the French superiors and in that of Bishop Bouvier, a procedure destined to destroy it.

The Bishop of Vincennes had said openly that he did not intend to allow Mother Theodore to return to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. If as his letter to Sister Saint Francis on December 12, 1842⁵ avers, he thought no good could be done without a change, he may have been in search for over a year of an opportunity to drive Mother Theodore from the Community. If this was the case, his best opportunity was at hand. Much easier now that she had been gone so many months to act at once to keep her permanently in France, and this was known to be his plan. Her sudden departure from France was not learned in Indiana until over a week after the Bishop had arrived at Saint Mary's, on the day after New Year's when the Sisters received the news from a letter from their Mother herself mailed before she sailed from Havre.

The restless energy and meticulous vigilance which the Bishop turned upon every least occurrence in his diocese was now concentrated upon the Community. As soon as he arrived, he took over the duties of local superior. He instructed the Sisters and novices and took cognizance of every slightest activity of the Community. Even a small piece of furniture could not be moved without his permission. Inadvertently they had shifted an old cupboard from the kitchen to the cellar of the bakery where in the absence of ice, milk and perishable foods were kept fresh in covered earthenware crocks and jars. Each time the Bishop was announced they had to rush to move this unwieldy piece of furniture up the cellar steps and back to the kitchen lest he should observe its absence and be displeased that his permission had not been asked. When he arrived he was accompanied by the elder of his two nephews, Mr. Ernest Audran, then

⁵ S.M.W.A.

in minor orders, who had formed part of the Bishop's colony from France in August, 1839. He had come, he said, to conduct Sister Stanislaus, one of the novices, from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to Vincennes where another Sister was needed. The Bishop met her and arranged for her departure without a word to Sister Saint Francis Xavier. "This Sister made all her preparations for leaving before saying a word to us." When the novice and the seminarian had left Saint Mary's, "the Bishop asked us in the evening who in the world had sent Sister Stanislaus to Vincennes."⁶

During his stay, the Bishop discovered that Mother Theodore, anxious to make some return to the generous Picquets for their substantial donation for the establishment of the Congregation of Providence in Indiana, had thought of sending a little colony of Sisters to Sainte Marie. No definite steps had been taken, but a house and ample accommodations there were in readiness, and owing to continued emigrations from Europe, almost the entire Picquet family, their children, relatives, and retainers had now swelled the Catholic settlement of Sainte Marie to something like a hundred and thirty persons. The Guthneck family eventually transferred in large part to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, where as we have seen, Père Michel and his son Charles entered the employ of the Community and five daughters and granddaughters became Sisters. Charles's son, Hubert Guthneck, was reared from the age of six years by Father Corbe at the rectory and returned there for his vacations after he entered the Vincennes seminary.

Lest negotiations should proceed any further, the Bishop wrote to Mr. Joseph Picquet: "Since I have been here, I have learned that the superior of the Community had proposed to you to send later the Sisters you ask for. I confess with my usual frankness that I do not approve of this arrangement. It was not necessary and was contrary to my engagements."⁷ The Picquets, thwarted a second time in their attempt to secure Sisters of Providence, bowed to the inevitable. "Our Sisters have not gone to Sainte Marie of the Prairies," wrote Sister Saint Francis to Mother Theodore. "Mr. Picquet has given their house to his mother." The creation of the diocese of Chicago and the consequent withdrawal by the Bishop of priests and Sisters from Illinois made any further attempt to help the Alsatian colony an impossibility.

The Bishop found the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods fervent and earnest, regular, and in every respect edifying. Two courses of action were open to him: not to molest them and to allow them to continue to advance in peace and quiet, or on the other hand to sow the seeds of uneasiness, of distrust and fear. Characteristically he chose the latter procedure. Assembling the Community he spoke to them on the subject of authority, of possible dissension between himself and their Mother which would oblige them to choose between two rival heads. The attack upon Mother Theodore was hardly veiled, and those who heard it were not children. The early Sisters, though young in religious life were at this time almost all mature women of twenty, thirty, or some even of forty years. The professed Sisters were present, and among the postulants

⁶ *Annals*. S.M.W.A.

⁷ 1 février, 1843. Vincennes Old Cathedral Archives.

were the three Sisters who had spent fifteen and twenty years in another order whom the Bishop had induced to leave their Community to become Sisters of Providence. All without exception knew and loved Mother Theodore. They revered her and appreciated her devotedness and the privations and hardships she was then undergoing to provide for the Community and to remove the burden of its maintenance from the head of the diocese.

Sister Saint Francis must have heard the Bishop with a sinking heart, hewing his way ruthlessly over the hearts and souls of his hearers, loosing anew those unseen currents of fear and bewilderment which had subsided so slowly after his last visit. She records, however, the reaction of the Community, that they seemingly remained united in charity and in desiring the return of their beloved Mother. One wonders how this union could have been real, however, when the novices could and did repeat verbatim to the novice mistress Mother Theodore's opinion of their capabilities and fitness for the religious life expressed in confidence to the Bishop as superior. We have seen, moreover, that most of those who were postulants at this time did not persevere. The ex-Sisters of Charity remained and died Sisters of Providence, but otherwise, Sister Anastasie and Sister Caroline excepted, the Community received during this year not one permanent addition.

Since the Bishop had declared that he would not permit Mother Theodore to return, he was naturally casting about for someone to replace her. He had long ago rejected Sister Saint Francis. His tentative glance fell therefore now upon Sister Basilide, and he devoted long hours of his stay to consultation and conference with her. When Mother Theodore had been removed and elected again in August, Sister Saint Francis Xavier had also been deposed and Sister Basilide appointed in her place. The appointment was greatly to her dissatisfaction at the time, and she wrote repeatedly to Europe, as we have seen, insisting upon her lack of the requisite qualities and begging to return to France. The Bishop was ignorant of her plans to go back to Ruillé. About a month before his January visit Sister Basilide had written to Mother Mary:

You knew that we were in difficulties. Yes, dear Mother, we were, and so much the more as we had only each other to whom to confide our sorrows and to ask advice; what was specially hard was that our trials came from the very source from which we should have expected consolation. We knew not what to do, to be compelled to agree or to offend our good Bishop. . . . When, however, after a continued refusal, he did and ordered what he thought proper, then I felt a heavy weight lifted from my shoulders, and I felt disposed to do all that Monseigneur wished. Although he arranged everything in such a way as to say that he had my consent, that troubled me very little. . . .

How many times I have been overwhelmed with sorrow and discouragement thinking that we were totally abandoned humanly speaking to our own strength and lights. What a chastisement for us! How can I be resigned, my dear Mother, as you counsel me, when I know and see that I am far from possessing the great virtue necessary to fill my place, for in what a critical situation I am here! If I must remain, at least one more person capable of replacing Mother Theodore is needed in order that the burden may not fall upon such a creature as I. Otherwise I shall be deceived as much as in the question of remaining united to Ruillé. "You may never return without the Bishop's consent," that is to say, never. O

Mother, how those words reecho in my heart, "You are separated from Ruillé." Oh, how far I was from understanding the circumstances when I asked before leaving France whether we would always belong to Ruillé. . . .

You will tell me that I can do more good here. I believe you, but I can also do more harm in a situation which in France would never have been thrust upon me. I cannot believe that God calls me to such a duty. I have neither the natural nor the supernatural gifts to decide the vocation of others in so difficult a country.⁸

About the same time writing to Mother Saint Charles she expressed herself similarly:

. . . there are too many difficulties here with this good Bishop who rules everything according to his views and with no hope of a change as long as he lives. He has the best intentions in the world, but no one can convince him that things are otherwise than as he believes. . . . He manages in such a way that one is obliged to yield and then he tries to convince you that you consented. . . . O Mother, you have no idea of it. The Bishop of Le Mans never acted thus.⁹

Mother Theodore was not to return to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Not only Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Basilide now knew that this was the Bishop's intention, but the Community was gradually informed of it also. Was Sister Basilide in any degree responsible for this harsh measure by her imprudence in revealing to the Bishop facts and circumstances which, considering his susceptible and suspicious character, could not but have deplorable, even tragic consequences? She had been a trusted counselor from the very beginning, had been present at every meeting of the tentative particular council when Mother Theodore took her Sisters into her confidence and discussed with them the problems and difficulties which clustered round their mission from the very start. Gradually their problems and trials had centered round the strange character of their good Bishop, and Sister Basilide knew all this, and was aware of every step in the negotiations with him. On the two crucial occasions when first Sister Aloysia and later Mlle. Bernard were to be asked to withdraw, she was consulted. Not a single decision of importance had been made without her knowledge. She knew that one of the main objects of Mother Theodore's trip was to obtain light and counsel upon her future procedure toward Bishop de la Hailandière, but this was the last fact which could be prudently or with impunity confided to His Lordship. It roused both his anger and his suspicions, and confirmed him in the very determination which Sister Basilide herself feared the most to provoke, separation from Ruillé.

His wave of displeasure after Mother Theodore had gone, had come to light earlier, written to Father Corbe, a comment upon one of Sister Basilide's letters:

This then it is, to consult, to be guided, to subject our house to that of France that the voyage has been undertaken, and this it is that they have kept hidden. Trouble lost! My resolution is taken. Never in the future shall our house have with that of France any other ties than those of charity and gratitude for the small amount of good it has bestowed upon us.¹⁰

⁸A Mère Marie, 6 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁹A Mère Saint Charles, 6 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

¹⁰A. M. Corbe, 17 juillet, 1843. S.M.W.A.

Now or later she gradually confided to him all the secrets of the Community. It was probably at this time that she showed him Mother Mary's letter mentioned previously, Mother Theodore's letters from France, and other confidential Community papers. He asked for the diary in the following note to Sister Basilide during his stay in mid-January:

My dear Sister,

I wish to see you here a few minutes when you can conveniently come. Bring if you please the diary in which will be found the transactions which took place here last August. I should also have seen and approved your last year's accounts. They have not been presented to me. Were they not kept?

I have the honor to be with respect

Your humble servant

CEL., *Bp. of Vinc.*¹¹

Wednesday, 2 P.M.

The Bishop had long known that reports adverse to his administration were current in France and had reached the officials of the Propagation of the Faith. He had asked Mother Theodore to defend him, and she consistently and earnestly strove to do so. "Sister Theodore has been perfectly loyal to you," wrote Bishop Bouvier.¹² The Bishop of Vincennes was very careful of his reputation in France. But when toward the end of the summer of 1843 news of his deposing Mother Theodore and of the other events of July and August at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, of the overnight profession of the two Sisters, of the admission of the Sisters from another order against the will of the Community, and of the Bishop's accepting missions and shifting the Sisters about without informing the motherhouse, became known to a limited number of persons in France, the unfavorable impression of his administration was considerably increased. In due time this adverse opinion came back to America and to the person most vitally concerned. Just how much his reputation had suffered, however, was brought home to him unmistakably sometime toward the end of his January stay when a letter from Bishop Bouvier called his attention in the most courteous and charitable manner, but in the unmistakable terms of truth and justice, to the imprudence and unlawful character of his treatment of Mother Theodore and the Sisters. Some Community records written a few years later recount the circumstances:

The Bishop of Le Mans, Superior of the Sisters of Providence in France, alarmed at the procedure of the Bishop of Vincennes, the election especially appearing to him irregular under every aspect, wrote to our Bishop expressing his astonishment and pain and offering friendly advice, founded upon his own experience in the direction of religious houses.¹³

Bishop Bouvier's letter was kind but of unmistakable import:

I have had occasion several times to observe that your administration seemed to be judged too severely without giving you a hearing. At Paris, at Rennes, and elsewhere they have taken the liberty of speaking thus. . . . Permit me, my Lord, to

¹¹ S.M.W.A.

¹² A Mgr. de Vincennes, 8 novembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

¹³ Annals. S.M.W.A.

address you with fraternal liberty in the charity of Our Lord. The excellent Superior General, who has just been reelected unanimously, is full of uneasiness in regard to the future of her daughters in America. . . . While Sister Theodore was traveling about with admirable devotedness on her begging mission, several letters arrived . . . and the superior saw in them that you thought you could decide alone upon the admission of subjects, their vocation, profession, etc., without making any account of the Constitutions and Rules. She entreated me to observe to you that a Congregation could not under pain of death be governed in this manner.

The Bishop must have the superintendence and the main direction, but he must leave to the organization its free action and abstain from anything of an arbitrary nature. He may not consent to the admission of a subject he believes to be dangerous or accept a contract he judges prejudicial to the Congregation or to one of the houses, but never may he force nor even urge the admission of any one whomsoever nor dispose of the temporalities himself in anything whatever. The Sisters have the management, as I said before, under his superintendence, because he is their guardian and protector, but he does not manage for them.¹⁴

The proper canonical manner of dealing with a religious Community, "the way consecrated by the experience of centuries," was here pointed out by a distinguished and saintly prelate, one of the first moral theologians in Europe, to the Bishop of Vincennes. Gently and charitably he was warned that continued procedure of the sort which had characterized his administration thus far would eventually destroy the Community. To the canons Bishop Bouvier added his own experience of years in the episcopacy and pointed to his two successful Congregations, of which Ruillé was one, and to the other religious orders in his diocese as a proof of the wisdom and justice of the Church's law. At the end of his letter, however, Bishop Bouvier's indignation got the better of his self-possession and he closed with the sharp remark:

I cannot understand, my Lord, how you have deposed Sister Theodore and caused an election to be held during her absence, undertaken as superior with your full consent given in writing. Happily this fact is not known in this vicinity for I can assure you it would have produced a very bad effect.

Did this fatherly and charitable remonstrance from so estimable a source produce a salutary effect upon the Bishop of Vincennes? Heeded, it might have changed the course of the history of the diocese. Unfortunately, it had no other immediate effect than to increase Bishop de la Hailandière's anger. "The annoyance he felt was extreme," wrote Sister Saint Francis. "This letter proved very unfortunate in its effects," but mingled with his tears and chagrin was no regret for his measures against the Community. He had thought that his procedure toward them during Mother Theodore's absence would not become known beyond the Indiana woods as he had forbidden the Sisters to speak of it. This prohibition was observed to the letter but did not cover their writing it to France, a measure much more injurious to the Bishop. Mortified at being disapproved in France, the Bishop severely reproved the Sisters for writing these facts to their Mother and ordered them to retract all they had said. Having written only the truth, they could not obey him. Their refusal, respectful but firm and constant, caused Monseigneur to refuse to hear their confes-

¹⁴ *Early Correspondence*, Book 4. S.M.W.A.

sions and later became his pretext for giving his resignation as Superior of the Community.¹⁵

Peace and security and the Bishop's favor were now and later offered to Sister Saint Francis Xavier, the price only a seemingly insignificant falsehood, but she never hesitated for an instant. Her spiritual life was lived upon the heights of complete fidelity, and this fidelity was the basis of her immovable trust in God. In that, she and Mother Theodore were at one. The spirit of the martyrs burned in their hearts, and they literally and honestly preferred death to the least unfaithfulness to the dictates of conscience. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had now no illusions as to her superior's probable fate. The Bishop's openly avowed intention was to drive her from the Community and when she was gone, a similar destiny would await Sister Saint Francis herself. This entire year of Mother Theodore's absence had been for her a period of cruel uncertainty and suffering transformed however by her sublime faith and confidence. The courage and trust in God, which two years earlier had brought her safe across the ocean and half a wild continent to Saint Mary's, were tapped again to tide her now over a sharper test. Then she was to a certain extent protected and assisted by an assured future awaiting her. Now the future was threatening, and uncertainty added its barbed dart to her mental anguish. That she realized, however, the great graces which God was bestowing upon her appears in a letter to Mother Mary written about this time:

Oh, yes, Mother, great is the mercy which from an Irma has made a Francis Xavier. During this past summer especially the Saints and Angels must have admired this mercy. They alone were able to understand it, for no one here knows what I was. True, my infidelities might have cast me back into my earlier state, but God has not permitted it. He seems to will to cause me to weep for my sins by renewed benefits. Will you permit me, Mother, to tell you my greatest faults that you may love still a little more the One who is willing to forgive them?

I have not had respect enough for the Bishop of Vincennes. I permitted myself to judge his intentions, and I spoke of it to Mr. Corbe and to Sister Basilide in a manner which might be to his disadvantage. I considered as coming from him and not from God the different measures which he ordered. I have wished to leave this diocese. I have had uneasiness as to the way I was directed or might be directed in future. You alone, my good Mother, can understand the greatness of my faults of distrust, for you better than any other know what Jesus has done for me.

Then when I came here, did I not relinquish to Him by vow the care of my soul? Let me weep a little with you, for now there are no longer two evils in this world for me. There is but one. Sin is the only thing I fear. On leaving Ruillé I suffered so much that I thought I should die, but Jesus remained to me, my good Jesus. He it is who consoled me and directed me. Now if He wishes to separate me from Ruillé, if even He wills that I should never write to you again, very well, I will obey Him.

I shall not tell you, my good Mother, how your excellent letter of September 24 has reassured me, for humanly speaking there is no possibility of acting in concert with our good Bishop. I will not refer to his ideas on the administration. I shall tell you one thing only, that he forced us to receive two Sisters . . . of another order, and even before one of them had put her foot into the novitiate, he asked us

¹⁵ *Annals*. S.M.W.A.

in all sincerity if we would send her a habit as he was going to keep her without making any novitiate at Vincennes. I will not go any further, for I might perhaps say too much.

O, Mother, Mother, it is not only the death of the heart that one must practice here, it is the very death of reason itself. You could never understand what Sister Theodore has had to suffer. All the illness and fatigues of her voyage are nothing in comparison with her anxieties of conscience. I would prefer death, if it were the will of God, to such a life. You tell us that the rights of the Bishop of Vincennes are the same as those of the Bishop of Le Mans. If he would be content with that, there would be no more difficulty, but, my poor Mother . . . I will not speak of him any further.

If we had faith like a grain of mustard seed, we would be able to move the mountains. It is more than eighteen hundred years since Our Lord said those words of truth to His Apostles, and their virtue is still undiminished.

Yes, Mother, I wish to love and to pray. Love is the vital spark of my frail existence. I can love You, Our God, I who deserve to be condemned to hate You in hell. I love You, O dear Jesus, I love You, and I am happy. I often repeat to Our Lord that I am happy, because I think that my happiness honors Him as He is its only source. I have not one single consolation other than Him. He knows that well. . . . Every day I appreciate more the grace God gave me in sending me to Ruillé in order that like another Ananias you might open my eyes. You would never believe the dangers to which religious and priests who do not love God alone are exposed in this country. . . . Can I thank Him enough? Can I sacrifice myself enough? No, never. He will supply for my incapacity. He will love Himself in me.

In silver and gold I think I have not put too much confidence . . . but I did hope in our superiors of Ruillé. It seemed to me that our little Community would be more secure if it were linked with the motherhouse. O my Jesus, pardon me. I wish no more to seek help nor hope but in You, and since I have nothing to offer You, I wish at least to abandon myself entirely to You.¹⁰

Sometime earlier she had written in similar vein to Mother Theodore:

Sister Stanislaus charges me to tell you that she wishes to go to meet you when you return. Alas, will you return? If I considered only your happiness, I would tell you to remain in our France with our beloved superiors, who show you so much affection and charity, but ignorant as I am of the designs of God upon you, I will be silent. Our mission has become so beautiful. It has received its last perfection. Everything which attached us even a little to this life has been broken. We are separated from Ruillé! O, my Mother, I had after you only this one joy on earth, but now you are far away, and I no longer belong to my beloved Congregation. And the Bishop is displeased with me! You wish then, O my God, that I love You with all the strength of my heart. We have accepted the cross, we must then carry it. O good cross, by whom will you be loved if not by missionary Sisters! I know not what you will do, my dear Mother, nor what will become of all of us. It seems impossible to me from a human viewpoint to govern a Congregation in the spirit of its Constitutions with a superior like the Bishop. He has the best will possible. You know all these things. I would wish to say that my judgment is false and that the judgment of all those who live with him is false also, but I cannot. . . .

Good Mr. Corbe sees everything in the God of peace. This does not always accord with my nature, especially in what concerns Ruillé. Six new Bishops are to be appointed. Some day perhaps the good God may call us to work in their dioceses.

¹⁰ A Mère Marie, 10 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

Who knows what may be His designs! And they perhaps would not have separated us from our motherhouse. O my God, would I be willing to take back my sacrifice? ¹⁷

Just what was to have been her fate is revealed in a letter to France of somewhat later date:

The result . . . was that I was no longer to be tolerated in the Community. Monseigneur after refusing to hear my confession was determined to put me out, and but for Mr. Corbe who intervened in my favor, God would have granted me the greatest humiliation that I could possibly receive. Oh, yes, my dear Sister Saint Charles, this poor Irma, who has been so praised in her family, who has been received with so much charity and affection at Ruillé, after sacrificing everything for the mission of Vincennes, has been condemned to be driven from this beloved Congregation of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. O my God, I was not worthy to be treated as your true servant. What I suffered in my own regard, however, was nothing to what I endured for our Mother.¹⁸

To Mother Mary, Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote at the same time:

It is true that from the time of John the Baptist to the present day the kingdom of heaven suffers violence as Our Lord said. It is very difficult, Mother, to renounce oneself, to die at every instant. This good God who knew that alone I had not courage enough for this work has sent me help. Never have I been in dispositions more proper to procure the glory of God than at present. If the seed must fall into the earth and die in order to produce fruit, I have fallen; I have been covered with rubbish. I have been an object of disgust and horror to Monseigneur. The very sight of me has been so repugnant that he was here nineteen days without approaching the interior of the Community; he who likes so much to examine the kitchen and the house did not venture to enter it lest he might meet me. This was perhaps fortunate for the peace of the others.

My good Mother, I have learned a little what men are and what I am myself. I renounce with all my heart their esteem and their affection. I have suffered much, however, knowing that Monseigneur was angry with me, that he refused even to hear my confession when as extraordinary confessor he heard the entire Community. Yes, I have suffered, for it seemed to me that God was angry with me also since the one who held His place wished even to drive me from His house. I have wept very often fearing to be a subject of displeasure to God since I was so repugnant to Monseigneur. Sometimes I have thought of you, Mother, and of all superiors, who can without wishing it, give such sorrow to those whom God has put under their protection. I do not accuse Monseigneur's intentions. . . . I pity him for giving me such pain, and I look upon all my humiliations as permitted by Our Lord.

If Mother Theodore had perished in crossing the ocean and I had been expelled from the diocese, I do not know where I could have gone. I had thought of taking refuge at the Sacred Heart until I could learn from you what I ought to do. To go to New York, however, money would have been necessary, and I had not a *sou*, and too, would they have received me? You have prayed for me, my poor Mother, I know, during this time because God has given me courage. I have never regretted having been chosen for this dear mission. Your letter of last May encouraged me. "Have faith and love," you said to me, "and you will cross mountains. Have confidence in God alone. He gave strength to Samson, wisdom to Solomon, and illumined the brow of young Jeremias. His arm is not shortened, and it is with nothing that He accomplishes His work."

¹⁷ A Mother Theodore, 18 août, 1843. S.M.W.A.

¹⁸ A Mère Saint Charles, 13 avril, 1844. S.M.W.A.

Yes, Mother, now it is that God can make use of me for I am less than nothing. If at the price of my humiliations and sufferings, I can procure some glory for Him I will be too happy. I am not capable of great things. You have told me so and I believe it sincerely. You have told me also, however, that my part would be to immolate myself and to love. One must be very ambitious not to be satisfied with so beautiful a vocation. I will try to fulfill it to the end. . . . You still love me, my good Mother. That is a great consolation for me but no longer a need as it was at Ruillé. That cry of my heart, *Love me*, is changed to *Love Him*. Oh, yes, let Jesus be loved, and I will be happy in Him. All my life and beyond I will be

YOUR POOR IRMA, SISTER FR. XAVIER.¹⁹

These letters are very important in the history of the daughters of Providence. They show and state in unequivocal terms that Sister Saint Francis Xavier was now convinced that it was not possible for them to continue to exist as a religious Community under Bishop de la Hailandière, and she mentions for the first time the alternative which later occupied so much of their thought and prayer, to escape from the diocese of Vincennes to seek an asylum where they might lead the religious life in peace and security elsewhere. Whether they had thought of it earlier cannot now be known with certainty, but after 1844 during months and even years it seemed the only solution to their heartaches, the only way they could continue to exist.

The Bishop of Vincennes had given an exposition of what he considered his rights over the Community in a letter written to Father Corbe after his July visit,

a long letter for us, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, which we had no permission to read nor to keep, but only to hear read as often as we desired. He explained his rights as Bishop which had just been examined at the Council of Baltimore.²⁰

This procedure is contrary to his usual practice. He was meticulous in the keeping of records and wrote his own personal reactions in detail, but no written account of his canonical rights as he understood them has survived in the Community archives. Though the Sisters probably heard the contents of the above letter more than once, only two points which it contained were noted: to place and replace the Sisters, and to change the Rule.²¹ Earlier in the long conversation under the porch in July he had said to Sister Saint Francis that the Bishop alone had authority over the Sisters, and that the last priest in the diocese had more power over them than their superior general. "He wished us to consider ourselves his property spiritual and temporal . . . he said, 'I am the proprietor spiritual and temporal of this house (meaning the Community). I can forbid you to take a step or send you away at once.' " ²² He had now received from Bishop Bouvier a correct statement of his rights and duties toward the Community.

When the Bishop left Saint Mary's toward the end of January, his mind seemed completely and definitively made up to dismiss Mother Theodore from the Community and the diocese. His attitude however

¹⁹ A Mère Marie, 13 avril, 1844. S.M.W.A.

²⁰ *Annals*. S.M.W.A.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.* S.M.W.A.

underwent a change before he went away, one of those strange and complete metamorphoses to which his temperament was subject. "The wind that agitates the trees of our forest does not change more suddenly than his Lordship's mind," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier;²³ the better traits of his character were "overshadowed by an unfortunate irascibility and fickleness."²⁴ Sister Basilide duly wrote his reaction to Mother Theodore:

Monseigneur was sensibly pained at the letters he received from France even while he was here, and he was so deeply hurt that he could not hide it from me. "What they think and say of me in France," he said, "affects me but little, but what touches me to the quick is that having done so much for this rising Community, which was my only hope, my only consolation, after setting all my priests against me for its advantage and covering myself with debts" (that he had remained almost a month with us was only to rid himself of the importunities of his creditors) after doing for you, Mother, what he would not have done for his own sister, he met from you only ingratitude, diffidence, and continued complaints of all he had accomplished for the best. Without bitterness, but heartbroken, he said to me, "God punishes me in the dearest of my affections. I have loved this Community and those who began it too much. But this is a moment of violent emotion which will pass and will give me a lesson for the future."²⁵

At the close of her letter, Sister Basilide added:

I know now the extent of the regard he has for you which is not small, I assure you, and this it is which makes him suffer.²⁶

He persisted nevertheless in his determination not to permit Mother Theodore to return to Saint Mary's.

When the Bishop left Sister Basilide, wrote Sister Saint Francis, he told her that when Sister Theodore arrived at Vincennes, he would not permit her to return to the Community till she had signed certain articles. One was that she would not visit his establishments, another that she would not speak to me, for from the moment when she would have a single conversation with me on the affairs of the house he would give in his resignation and retire.

He had already spoken of resigning as ecclesiastical superior of the Community.

Pay attention to what you do, Sister Basilide had written to Mother Theodore in July,²⁷ for either you will submit to his will or he will retire. He has resolved to enforce his authority. . . . The other Bishops are not willing to consent to his resigning from his bishopric. We would then have a priest [as superior] but would still be in the diocese of a Bishop who had asked for us and governed us for a time but had no further interest in us.

One paragraph in Bishop Bouvier's letter was especially displeasing to Bishop de la Hailandière. Since the period subsequent to the fire in October, 1842, he had not contributed financially to the support of the Community. Sister Basilide refers to this fact repeatedly in her letters to Mother Theodore, and this inability to continue his financial help had

²³ *Annals*. English translation of Sister Mary Eudoxie, p. 17.

²⁴ *Life and Lifework of Mother Theodore Guérin*, p. 280.

²⁵ Sister Basilide à Mother Theodore, 21 février, 1844. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 16 juillet, 1843. S.M.W.A.

been the prime, original reason for Mother Theodore's voyage to France. When she was stranded in Paris in September, 1843, menaced with the necessity of remaining indefinitely in Europe for lack of funds to defray her passage to America, Bishop Bouvier, her first and continuous benefactor, interested himself and applied to the Propagation of the Faith for a subsidy for her as we have seen. He gives details to the Bishop of Vincennes:

Through your letter of April 30, you direct dear Sister Theodore to me and commend her to me in a special manner. Notwithstanding all the collections to which we so often have recourse and which end by discouraging charitable souls upon whom the entire burden always falls, I have made it a duty toward you, my Lord, and toward this good Sister and her establishment to assist her with my most active concurrence. . . . Having learned that the Propagation of the Faith had granted funds directly to Abbé Moreau, I wrote to the Treasurer at Paris, M. Choiselat, recommending Sister Theodore and her establishment without, of course, any prejudice, my Lord, to you. . . .

M. Choiselat answered that . . . in your request you had included the Sisters of Providence for quite a large sum, that the Council of Paris had taken the motives of this request into consideration and had in consequence increased your allowance, and that he would give Sister Theodore a note for what was destined for her.

What she has obtained through your recommendation and mine together was given directly and solely for her establishment, and no other use may be made of it. I feel confident therefore that with the aid of this sum in hand added to what the Propagation of the Faith granted you for them, these pious persons will little by little extricate themselves from their difficulties.²⁸

Bishop de la Hailandière was excessively annoyed at losing some of his funds, which he said Mother Theodore had stolen from the Propagation of the Faith and which he would make her give up on her return. A seemingly trifling circumstance this, nevertheless it added to his Lordship's annoyance and clinched his resolution to dismiss her from the diocese. He now knew, too, that her mission in France had succeeded far beyond her first hopes, but only gradually did the real extent of her *quête* appear from the continued activity of her friends in France. She had not spared herself, as Bishop Bouvier said, and had developed "a rare aptitude for this sort of agency, of itself disagreeable enough."²⁹ By this time it was known too that she had left practically all her funds in Europe in the care of Canon Lottin, chancellor of the diocese of Le Mans and an old and tried friend. He was to be her treasurer. He placed her original sums at interest and acted as a banking center for the various friends who continued her work after she left France. Some hundreds of francs, the fruit of days of wearisome toil, were lost through an agent to whom they had been entrusted. These were the days when what is known as hoarding was still general, and Mother Theodore knew from painful experience the uncertainties of the American banks, but Canon Lottin's skill and care were beyond cavil. Only considerably later by degrees as she needed the money did he send principal and interest to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

During all this time, the entire year of their Mother's absence, the Community had in their devoted chaplain a wise and faithful counselor.

²⁸ 8 novembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

This good Mr. Corbe, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, had been given us by a benevolent protection of Divine Providence to help and sustain our poor Congregation. He had succeeded Mr. Parret who had spent one year at Saint Mary's after the departure of Mr. Buteux. Before coming here Mr. Corbe was the pastor of Vincennes and superior of the seminary.

The Bishop considered him his best friend, and in truth his untiring kindness in sacrificing his tastes to those of his Lordship would alone have entitled him to be regarded as such. During the first year of his sojourn here, as he was but little acquainted with our Rules, he followed as much as possible his habitual maxim to yield in order to keep peace. He opposed however his Lordship's project of sending all the novices and professed Sisters to the parlor of the academy in order to learn how to receive strangers. They were to go without a superior and not to be under the influence of their Mother, nor in her absence of "the one she had rendered like herself."³⁰

The responsibilities and duties of chaplain in view of the precarious situation of the Community weighed heavily, however, upon this excellent priest during all this time. He was not in accord with the Bishop's intention to expel Mother Theodore from the Community, and Sister Saint Francis owed her safety to him. He absolutely refused also to sanction the Bishop's plan to send a novice as housekeeper to spend her days and nights at the farmhouse in the service of the workmen, and he was gradually being forced by circumstances to abandon his policy of peace at any price. Bishop Bouvier's frank and courageous letter of reproof to the Bishop of Vincennes pointing out the Church law which governed his relations with the Community, probably opened Father Corbe's eyes to the fact that in its present condition it was rapidly verging toward destruction.

These months so crucial in the inner history of the Community were also the period of its greatest temporal need. Although in everyone of Sister Basilide's letters she insists to Mother Theodore that they have food enough and that Monseigneur has not been asked to contribute anything to their support, we learn from other sources that their poverty was never so acute. After the theft of their purse they were nearly three weeks without any money whatever.

We were seventeen days with two *sous*. In the morning we never knew what there would be for dinner. I took an infinite pleasure in observing the care of our Heavenly Father for His children. Never had I less uneasiness. One day He sent a man to bring us some cabbages, and at another time potatoes. We did not die of hunger though several times we had nothing but apples.³¹

One wonders what was served to the Bishop during his month-long stay. An earlier letter from him and some entries in the ledger, "Shot for these gentlemen" and "Mending Mr. Corbe's gun," suggest a way in which their menu was probably increased. "Notre bon Père Corbe" was a good shot and was fond of hunting, ranging the woods in search of squirrels and small game which was still abundant. Writing to Father Martin at Vincennes the Bishop tells him of the arrival of several priests at Saint Mary's very tired and hungry. They went hunting, and "the Sister cook returned every bit nicely cooked to which all did justice." Mother Cecilia

³⁰ Sœurs du Conseil à Mgr. Eccleston, 25 avril, 1846.

³¹ Sister Saint Francis Xavier à Mère Marie, 10 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

describes the privations of the two years which followed upon the fire of October, 1842, and which were the period of greatest scarcity of raiment and other necessities as well as food. She notes the circumstances which no doubt she observed on her return from France:

The living was extremely scanty. The food consisted chiefly of corn bread and pork and not always enough of that. The table could hardly be poorer than it was. The same with regard to wear. Shoes were scarce; any kind that could be got was worn without regard to the season and they were used to the last. . . . Clothes were mended and patched without end, but in nothing did this poverty and patching show more than in the skirts of the Sisters. Some had different colors of black, green, and brown being made of unlike pieces, others were so patched that the whole skirt was one piece of patches.³²

Despite the penury which oppressed the Community, the *pensionnat* was prospering, and the little building in the woods had now become so crowded that an addition to it seemed imperative. The Bishop's promise to Mother Theodore to give the deeds for the site of the motherhouse to the Community if she returned with funds sufficient to complete the academy reveals that they had already planned to add wings to it when circumstances would permit. The increased enrollment now brought the subject forward in a new and imperative light. Just at this time too, the day before the Bishop went away, the first novice to enter from the academy arrived at the novitiate. Jane Brown and her family were well known to Mother Theodore, and Sister Basilide had announced her several months earlier. She was expected for Christmas, but only on January 23 did she finally join the group of postulants. Eighteen years old, a true pioneer's daughter, and cast in an unusual physical and moral mould, this young girl was destined to outlive all the early Sisters, dying at ninety-three during the annual retreat of the last year of the First World War, August 10, 1918. She became the third superior general and the first native American to hold that office and was an outstanding figure in Community affairs during all but her last years of retirement and extreme old age.

Her ancestors were early settlers of the Maryland colony of the Baltimores, and like most of the English Catholics of the period impoverished by the payment of fines for recusancy in their mother country, William Browne came to Maryland in the company on the *Ark* and the *Dove* and settled in Saint Mary's County. He was a member of the first group recruited by Cecil Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore himself, and seft to Maryland under the leadership of his younger brother, Leonard Calvert. The names of the comparatively small group of "gentlemen adventurers," all Catholics, who contributed financial support to the enterprise, and of the free artisans and colonists, almost all Protestants, who sailed on the *Ark* and the *Dove*, have been preserved in history, but those of the Catholic redemptioners and others on board have not come down to posterity. William Browne's name is found, however, among the members of the first historic band who formed the vanguard in America of that part of the great Escapist movement by which the Catholics of England fled in increasing numbers from bitter persecution in their homeland from Queen

³² Mother M. Cecilia's MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 54.

Elizabeth's time onward, at first to the continent of Europe and later to the New World.

When Lord Baltimore's two little vessels, evading the vigilance of the Star Chamber, sailed down the Thames on Saint Cecilia's day, November 22, 1633, stopping at Cowes to take on the three Jesuits, they were beginning a four-months voyage across the cold and trackless Atlantic. When during the Tercentenary celebration in 1934 replicas of the two sturdy little sailing vessels floated in the calm blue waters of the Potomac off Saint Mary's City, spectators were led to wonder how human beings could have lived so long in them, and especially in the *Dove*, of the type known as a pinnace, which resembled nothing so much as a long cigar box. They crossed successfully, however, and on Lady Day, the feast of the Annunciation in 1634, a landing was made, Mass was celebrated for the colonists on Saint Clement's Island, now Blackstone's, and a cross erected to take formal possession of the land.

Settling in Saint Mary's County the Browne family remained there amidst varying fortunes to the Catholics and to the Calverts to the end of the eighteenth century. Monica Brown was born there in 1785, but her younger brother, Aloysius, Mother Anastasie's father, was not born till January 18, 1793, after the family had left Saint Mary's County to locate at Bladensburg in the vicinity of the National Capital, celebrated as the old political duelling ground where Decatur and others were killed. Their mother was a member of the old Catholic Reynolds family, whose ancestor John Reynolds had come to Maryland as a redemptioner with Thomas Cornwaleys in 1660.

The times were stirring. Washington had retired from the Army at Annapolis in 1783, but was still President in 1798. Monica Brown had distinct remembrances even in old age of the famous personalities who might be met at any time near the embryo National Capital, Washington and Lady Washington driving in their celebrated coach and four to Mount Vernon, Thomas Jefferson then Vice-President inspecting cannon, Billy Barlow, minister to England, and Van Ness and Burns who owned considerable tracts of land in the present District of Columbia.

After the Revolution the Maryland Catholics, restive under the old anti-Catholic prejudices, which still, despite Washington's best efforts, survived the French alliance and the patriotism of Catholics during the war, signed in 1785 a league of sixty Catholic families, pledged to cross the mountains and settle in Kentucky, then but recently revealed to prospective settlers by the explorations of Daniel Boone, himself a member of a Catholic family. Accounts vary as to the exact date of the Brown family's arrival in the vicinity of Bardstown, Kentucky, and the death of the father from a falling tree while engaged in cutting timber in the woods, but in 1813 Monica Brown was married by Bishop David at Saint Thomas Seminary by dispensation to her cousin, Barnaby Reynolds, his younger brother Ignatius Aloysius Reynolds, later second Bishop of Charleston, acting as acolyte on the occasion. Some years later Aloysius Brown married Elizabeth Drury.

The tide of colonization was flowing strongly across the Ohio River,

and entire tracts of Indiana were populated with Catholic Kentuckians. The Maryland colonists had missed the blue grass through the chicanery of Baltimore speculators, and the soil of the neighborhood of Bardstown was poor. In 1817 both the Brown and Reynolds families left Kentucky for the new and fertile prairie lands opened to settlement by Harrison's Purchase in Illinois. Aloysius Brown, his wife, and baby son Magnus went first in true pioneer fashion, Mrs. Brown with the baby riding on horseback, their few household effects upon a led horse and Aloysius Brown himself on foot, his trusty gun over his shoulder and probably thrust into his belt the long hooked hunting knife named in Maryland from Colonel James Bowie, from which the Indians had given the Kentuckians their formidable name, "Long Knives." Tecumseh's activities had held back colonists for some years from Harrison's Purchase, but the Indians though still numerous were no longer a menace, and the little pioneer family pushed on past Vincennes and Terre Haute across the Wabash to the eastern strip of what later became part of the state of Illinois to the angle formed by the Ten o'Clock Line.

There they became the founders of the old Kentucky Catholic settlement known as the North Arm of the Grand Prairie, fifteen miles northwest of the present site of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, a region to which Father Badin in Kentucky had directed Aloysius Brown to serve as a guide and preceptor to the scattered Catholics in the absence of a priest. They found the setting very different from the thick forests of Kentucky to which they were accustomed. The name of prairie had been given by the early French explorers and trappers to the natural meadows timbered only along the streams. There were two Grand Prairies in Illinois. The larger extended from the Mississippi to the Illinois River; the smaller of the two, located in what is now Edgar and Clark Counties in the vicinity of Paris, was intersected by forest and in part bordered the Wabash river. The sight of the immense plain with prairie grass, waist or even shoulder high, waving in the breeze was a beautiful one. The soil was excellent, too, especially along the edge of the woods, and the Deere plow which was eventually adopted by the settlers broke it easily.

Immediately after the family's arrival, Mr. Brown and a neighbor set out with an ox team for Chicago in search of pioneer necessities, nails and window glass for their cabin, flour and ammunition. Elizabeth Drury Brown was compelled to remain alone in her husband's absence, her only protection a pair of large mastiffs called bear dogs. She had gathered brushwood and built a ring round the cabin so that if any wild animals appeared, the brush could be fired to drive them away. One day the dogs treed a panther, but eventually it came down and disappeared. Mr. Brown was away for over two months, so long that it was feared he and his companion had met with disaster. In fact on their way home when crossing a river swollen by rains, the oxen missed the ford, and away went team, wagon, and provisions in the deep water. By herculean exertion, everything was saved even most of the precious flour, and they arrived safe at the cabin on the prairie at the North Arm.

In the spring of 1818, Barnaby Reynolds and his wife arrived followed by a considerable contingent of Catholic Kentuckians. The chil-

dren of the settlers played with the little Kickapoo Indians and with the troops of dogs about their cabins, and learned to don the three turkey feathers of the tribe and manipulate the bow and arrows. Aloysius Brown in the intervals of pioneering acted as schoolmaster and religious leader to the colony, who were sometimes years without seeing a priest. No doubt Father Badin visited them and ministered to their spiritual needs on his return from Europe, but Aloysius Brown officiated at marriages and presided at the religious services held in his house. Father Nicholas Petit and Father Lawrence Picot also sought out the Catholic colony at the North Arm which had grown considerably. Bishop Bruté estimated their number as sixty families when he visited them first in 1835. Both Aloysius Brown and Barnaby Reynolds had fought in the War of 1812, and after they located in Illinois they recruited a troop from the vicinity of the North Arm to take part in the Black Hawk War.

Before Father Buteux's appointment as pastor of the three adjacent stations of Terre Haute, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and the North Arm, plans were made under Father Lalumiere's direction for a church on the prairie. Aloysius Brown gave a site from his farm and learned the process of making brick in order to erect the roomy and sturdy edifice which, named for him, Saint Aloysius, and dedicated by Father Lalumiere late in 1837, did continuous service for the Catholics of the vicinity till it was replaced by the present church in 1900. The missionaries on their travels were always welcome to the home of Aloysius Brown, and the Reverend Hippolyte Du Pontavice, the first priest ordained by Bishop de la Hailandière, spent the six months December, 1839, to June, 1840, learning English as a guest in the family before going on to his first mission in Illinois, Juliet or Mount Juliet, now Joliet (1840-1844).

Aloysius Brown's children were among the first to avail themselves of the educational advantages offered at Vincennes before and after Bishop Bruté arrived. A few years after Jane and Matilda entered the academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, their younger brother William was a student at Saint Gabriel's College, Vincennes. Ann or Nancy Brown was a pupil at Saint Mary's Female School as early as 1835. She had for several years cherished a wish to become a Sister of Charity, and the Eudist Father John Vabret writing to Mother Rose White at Emmitsburg in June, 1838, refers to her: "Nancy Brown is always in the same dispositions, and they await an opportunity to send her to you. . . . She possesses an admirable disposition, gentle, obedient, pious, always disposed to do what she is told is for the glory of God and the salvation of her soul."³³ In September, 1838, accompanied by Father Deydier, who was going east to collect for his new church in Evansville, she made the long journey to Maryland where she entered the Community at Emmitsburg, and as Sister Mary Aurelia spent most of her life at Saint Joseph's Valley, dying in 1857 at the age of thirty-five. Like Mother Anastasie she excelled in the fine needlework which was so highly prized at the time, and the sisters used to exchange patterns and choice bits of painting and "fancy work." *The*

³³ Sister Mary Agnes McCann: *The History of Mother Seton's Daughters* (Longmans Green, New York, 1917), vol. 1, p. 253.

History of Mother Seton's Daughters tells us that Sister Aurelia "died May 3, 1857, in the most edifying sentiments."³⁴

Father Buteux could celebrate Mass only every third Sunday at each of his three missions. The Brown family despite the distance often heard Mass on Sunday at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods after the Sisters came from France. Mother Anastasie relates their first meeting with Sister Olympiade and Mother Theodore. Her father was a devout and spiritual man looked up to by his children as a saint. His Catholicism was of the sturdy type which welcomed controversy, and he was much given to religious discussions with his Protestant neighbors. He loved to talk of spiritual matters with Mother Theodore, and she lent him books from the little library of works of piety owned by the Community. Having learned to construct a kiln and make brick for the church at the North Arm, he later furnished the brick for the first Academy building at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1840. In September, 1841, his youngest daughter Jane and her sister Matilda entered as pupils. Despite the well-known piety and ardent Catholicism of the family, there must have been some opposition to Jane's leaving home. "Jane Brown arrived at the Novitiate on the 23rd and is well satisfied. The poor child has bought her vocation dearly if however contradictions are not in themselves a gift," wrote Sister Francis Xavier to Mother Theodore at New Orleans. "I wish we had a dozen like her," added Sister Basilide.

The relations of the family with the Community continued close and cordial, and Aloysius Brown felt that a supreme blessing descended upon them when Mother Theodore visited their home at the North Arm, but the recurrent malaria which had carried off three daughters of the Reynolds family within a short period induced the entire Brown-Reynolds clan with married sons and daughters and their families to leave Illinois in 1846. After an exploratory tour over the Northwest and a tentative location in Wisconsin, Aloysius Brown and his children located finally in Austin, Minnesota, where they were instrumental in erecting Saint Augustine's Church. Mother Anastasie was deeply disappointed when at his death in 1866 her good father left her portion of his estate to the poor church of Austin. The Community was still struggling, and only two years later she was elected superior general.

The Kentuckians of original or later Maryland stock, who were the first Catholic settlers of the state of Indiana after the French regime, and who made up a very large contingent of the Catholic population of Vigo County and its environs, were an excellent nucleus for the religious development of the diocese of Vincennes. Thoroughly indoctrinated with Catholic teaching by the Jesuit missionaries in Maryland and inured to a tradition of guarding their faith by a century and a half of intermittent persecution, they had learned in Kentucky the duty and necessity of contributing to the support of religion, an obligation which was hardly noticed in Maryland where the Jesuits financed church activities and maintained the chapels in their manors. The custom of spiritual reading

³⁴ The same source informs us that during the three following nights she appeared to Sister Marcelline Dorsey in the infirmary and warned her of her approaching death and told her to prepare for it. The last time she appeared she said to Sister: "Is not God good to let me finish my purgatory here?"

and family prayers was transplanted across the mountains from Maryland to Kentucky, and to these salutary practices was added systematic home instruction in the catechism and the Holy Scriptures and in controversy then so popular among all denominations and for which they were taught to lose no opportunity.

The Catholics were advised to settle in groups, as the early missionaries of Kentucky preferred to concentrate their efforts upon building up a fervent Catholic population rather than scattering the priests over vast districts thinly populated with Catholics. The first Catholic emigrants from Maryland therefore located in the poor section near Bardstown, where for pecuniary reasons Bishop Flaget fixed his residence and where the Catholic settlers faithfully followed him, preferring proximity to the church for themselves and their children to economic advantages.

Good laymen in the new and distant settlements were charged with the maintenance of religious services on Sundays and with safeguarding the faith of the Catholics from the advances of circuit riders. "Our Catholics of English stock are the pride and glory of our flocks," wrote the Jesuit Father Hunter in Maryland before the Revolution, and later in Indiana they proved hardly less commendable and were the main support of religion, carrying on to a remarkable degree the devotional practices learned in early youth from the Jesuits in Maryland: family prayers morning and evening, spiritual reading, exact observance of the fasts and abstinences, and Sunday morning devotions with hymns and prayers when Mass was not possible. The Reverend E. F. Walters of Lafayette used to relate how with an involuntary smile he had heard Aloysius Brown's six-foot sons sing, "I am a little Catholic, and Christian is my name." Night prayers in the family were sometimes found so lengthy as to be a little irksome to the young, but the smallest child must be in his place before the well known words, "Blessed be the holy and august Trinity, one and undivided, now and forever," could be pronounced by the patriarch himself.

The first church blessed by Bishop Bruté was Saint Mary's among the Kentuckians of Daviess County. Saint Peter's for another group of Kentucky emigrants had been dedicated in 1831 and was the first church visited by Bishop Bruté after his installation in 1834. The Kentuckians at the North Arm consoled him by their zeal and piety when he visited them first in 1835.

Devoted as they were, however, and earnest in the practice of their religion, all these Indiana Catholic settlers were trained in the rigid Jansenistic practices characteristic of that time. Frequent Communion was practically unknown, and to many the yearly Easter Communion was preceded by the black fast on Good Friday and a searching soul examination and confession on Holy Saturday. Dancing, abominated by the missionaries, seems to have been the only undesirable practice which they could curtail but never eradicate. Often Father Badin jogging home at evening on horseback from a missionary journey, hearing the lively strains of the violin stealing across the fields, would present himself in the midst of the festive gathering and announce a catechism lesson or night prayers. Bishop Bruté never laid this emphasis upon dancing although the Vincennes

Creoles were not less addicted to it than the Kentuckians. During Bishop Bruté's bleak first New Year season of 1835 at Vincennes when the indifferent Creoles were making no effort to contribute to the support of their indigent Bishop, they were dancing away gaily the days of the traditional holiday season culminating in the King's ball at Epiphany to the music of the old songs, "La Guillannée," "Le Roi du bal," "Au Clair de la lune" "Boum-ba-di-boum," and "Kercie" or "N'avez-vous pas vu mon Kercie?"³⁵

Some of the early Indiana priests did not resemble Bishop Bruté in this respect. It is told of the Reverend Bartholomew Piers for nearly fifty years (1849-1895) pastor at Montgomery and saintly son of Thomas Piers, who built the first church at Floyd Knobs, that he once gave permission to a niece who was staying with him to visit a pious Catholic family near Washington. The young daughter of the house was permitted by her mother³⁶ to attend a dance given by friends in the neighborhood, and the guest accompanied her. Next morning the Reverend uncle's old horse and buggy were seen in the lane approaching the house. He descended in a whirlwind of indignation demanding his niece. The mother compelled her daughter to ask his pardon humbly on her knees. He gave the pardon perhaps perforce, but he took the niece.

In only comparatively recent years have the strict measures against social dancing abated in the American Church. A hard and fast line was drawn for many years between the so-called square dances, the lancers, quadrille, Virginia reel, et cetera, which were permitted, and the waltz which was long taboo. In 1860 when King Edward VII, then Prince of Wales, was traveling in America incognito as Baron Renfrew, a ball was given in his honor at the Southern Hotel in Saint Louis at which one of the Miss Ewings, General Sherman's sisters-in-law, was present. The Prince asked her to waltz, and is said to have greatly admired the courageous words with which she declined, "I regret that the rules of my Church do not permit me to do the round dances."

Aside from their passion for dancing, the Kentuckians impressed the missionaries favorably. Their skill with the rifle was phenomenal. It was almost the first art they learned, and they continued experts till old age. They were usually opposed to slavery, though even in Vigo County some retained their Southern sympathies and were pointed out as Copperheads during the Civil War. In the main, however, they contributed their quota to the political development of the Western country. "The Kentuckians were a splendid race," wrote the Reverend Augustus J. Thébaud, S.J.,³⁷ "tall and well proportioned, remarkably handsome and stately in manners, sociable and affable in daily intercourse, talented and apt to become good scholars when educated. . . . These people were a compound of simplicity and shrewdness. . . . Fear, suspicion, distrust were unknown among them owing to the total absence of crime, nay of misconduct in the country."

³⁵ Cecilia Ray Berry, Ed. *The Folk Songs of Old Vincennes* (H. T. Fitzsimmons Co., Inc., Chicago, 1946), pp. 10, 48, 53, 75, 92.

³⁶ Mrs. Jeremiah Egan, Sister Saint Helena's mother.

³⁷ *Forty Years in America* (U. S. Catholic Historical Society, New York, 1904), p. 52.

The Kentuckians, as has been said, were the earliest Catholic settlers in Vigo County, but Irish emigrants began to follow them as soon as the public works, the National Road, and the Wabash and Erie Canal, upon which they were employed, crossed the borders of the county. Several Irish names appear among the early owners of the present site of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods: Patrick Hearn, or Herron, as it appears on the first deeds, James Early, Felix Kelly, Michael Ward, and others. James Sheern, who owned at one time the present site of the Guérin tennis court and the shores of Lake Le Fer at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, was a Kentuckian, but later, a number of Irish families came to live in the vicinity. The French missionaries were devoted to them and appreciated highly their staunch faith and honesty and their generosity in contributing to the support of religion. Like the French and Germans, the Irish in America generally joined the anti-aristocratic or Democratic party. Bishop de la Hailandière thought highly of the Irish and would have been glad to settle them upon farms in the rural districts of the diocese of Vincennes. His opinions of their racial characteristics recur from time to time in his letters: "The Irish have a special character, good, generous, enthusiastic, capable of great things. . . . Taken all in all they are a very good people."³⁸

Father Lalumiere after his appointment to "Terre Haute and the Canal" in 1842 found, though his parish at the former place was small, that the work of the canal was overwhelming, far beyond the powers of one man. Sister Saint Francis Xavier records his grief when he was unable to hear the crowds of Irishmen who came to confession. Father Du Pontavice, however, at Joliet worked very successfully among them especially at making, as he said, "Cold water men," and to further the cause of temperance, both he and Father Guéguen gave up the *vin rouge*, which the French people drink so generally with their meals, and the "excellent beer which we get here for nothing," and confined themselves to tea and cold water.

Whisky was one luxury which the pioneers did not lack. Corn was plentiful, and many farmers had distilleries. The ruins of a pioneer still may be seen today on Joseph Thralls's old homesite adjacent to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Even so strict a pastor as the Flemish missionary in Kentucky, Father Charles Nerinckx, allowed a certain amount of what was called hard liquor to the farmers who helped him build his log churches. Temperance societies grew to be a necessity along the canal, however, as the very conditions of the work led to intemperance. The "jigger man" went up and down the line all day handing out the jiggers of whisky included in the wages of the crew, which rendered the heavy labor bearable. One writer on the subject records the query, "Then all the canals were dug by intoxicated men?" and the reply that no one else would dig a canal. The unequal distribution of these jiggers was one of the causes of the terrible canal wars, which broke out from time to time. These wars however died out gradually, though not till long after Bishop Bruté had induced Bishop John Hughes in 1838 to prevent the Irish immigrants in New York from joining the secret oath-bound societies which involved them in battles between Far Downs or Connaught men and Far

³⁸ A Mother Theodore, 16 février, 1841. S.M.W.A.

Ups or Corkonians. These terms are not immediately clear, as *down* in Ireland always means north, and the Far Downs were from that section of the country. Mother Theodore makes only one reference to these violent disputes which no power but the priest's could quell. In February, 1854, she records, "The Irishmen who work on the railroad have been fighting like lions day and night with guns and all sorts of weapons for the past three days. Our Father Corbe is the only one who can appease them."³⁹

The daughters of the Irish immigrants entered in great numbers among the Sisters of Providence and all the other American religious orders and contributed largely to their development. The first Irishwomen to enter at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were Sister Gabriella and Sister Mary Celestia, and the missionaries usually referred to them as *les Irlandaises*. The former was from Connaught, the latter from the town of Ardfinnan near Dublin. They met in the novitiate the French Sisters of the original group, and the daughters of the native Americans and of the German colonists from the southern part of the state. Seeing this diverse group with strongly marked national characteristics, Sister Saint Francis Xavier on her arrival from France likened Mother Theodore to Rebecca with rival nations struggling for mastery in her bosom and thought they never could be moulded into a homogeneous religious group. Mother Theodore with the aid of divine grace, however, accomplished the seemingly impossible task. "Daughters of four different nations," she calls them, "assembled here . . . under the protection of the Lord in the heart of the dense woods, having nothing in the world but Him for support and protector."⁴⁰

³⁹ Mother Theodore's Diary. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁰ A Mère Saint-Charles, 28 février, 1842. S.M.W.A.

CHAPTER XIV

TEMPORAL STABILITY ASSURED

STRUGGLE FOR SPIRITUAL CONSOLIDATION

"What matters it what becomes of us provided that the Will of God is accomplished."

MOTHER THEODORE

FILLED with the painful news contained in the letters from Sister Basilide which had awaited her at New Orleans and harassed by the delays of a slow convalescence, Mother Theodore's thoughts continued to fly like homing birds to her disconsolate children at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. "Notwithstanding the constant and affectionate care of these pious and devoted Ursulines, my heart could find no rest away from my dear Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods," she wrote in her Journal, "and was burning with the desire to join them all again."¹ To be ill for so long at such a time when she was so urgently needed by her Community in the woods of Indiana seemed a heavy cross indeed, but she bore within her frail frame the heritage from generations of hardy Breton mariners, a heart of steely courage against misfortune, tempered and exalted by supernatural faith and love. Her tender feelings, however, rendered her crosses a doubly heavy burden, and often when morally she was able to bow beneath some new trial accepting it lovingly from the hand of God, she was nevertheless physically overwhelmed by the shock. That she felt that her illness at New Orleans was in some measure due to the news of the untoward events which had taken place at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods is proved by the single remark which escaped her in one of her letters, that what she had learned on arriving at New Orleans was enough to kill ten persons.²

Her relations with the Bishop were the principal source of anxiety. Both Sister Basilide and Sister Saint Francis Xavier had warned her of further trials to come. They had urged her to be exceedingly careful in her communications with Bishop de la Hailandière, and explicitly not to let the Bishop know of any decisions on their affairs which she might have received in France. Somewhere, we know, carefully stowed away among her effects was the paper with the questions decided the previous September at Ruillé, the answers in her writing of which Bishop Bouvier had a copy in his possession. Later, unfortunately, Bishop de la Hailandière discovered the existence of this paper and insisted repeatedly upon seeing it, a request which they dared not comply with owing to the highly confidential character of its contents most of which personally concerned the Bishop himself. No communication came from him to Mother Theodore during her two months stay in New Orleans. This of itself was disquieting. She did not yet know of his resolve to expel her from the diocese,

¹ *J. and L.*, p. 165.

² Sister Basilide à Mother Theodore, 21 février, 1844. S.M.W.A.

but she knew enough to make the long slow days of convalescence doubly painful as they crept by. Seemingly so untoward, this illness proved, however, eventually to be the means used by Divine Providence to bring her back safe to the anxious hearts awaiting her at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The Bishop left Saint Mary's fully determined never to permit Mother Theodore to return, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, but God, Who had just rescued her from the abyss of the ocean, was powerful enough to undo the projects of men. The means our Heavenly Father chose for this end at first caused us deep sorrow. He permitted Mother Theodore to fall ill upon arriving in New Orleans. While detained there she received letters which made her acquainted with the state of affairs in our Congregation.³

The letters received by Mother Theodore at New Orleans and later en route northward, letters filled with information concerning everything at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, were mainly from Sister Basilide. Sister Saint Francis Xavier's were such as they had been all during Mother Theodore's absence, the outpourings of a heart resigned to suffer. Definite details in them were very few. She felt it useless no doubt to burden Mother Theodore's heart with an account of matters which she had no power to remedy while still thousands of miles away. "My poor Mother, you have suffered so much for us that I would be happy to give you a little minute of affection, but your excellent letter of October 6, reveals your crucified heart rejoicing in its sufferings."⁴

Later during Mother Theodore's illness she wrote again to New Orleans:

What shall I say to you, my good and beloved Mother? Nothing except that the time has come when we must be truly happy if we love to suffer. I will not enter into details . . . I think, however, that I may say, "Do not come to any conclusion before you have seen us." There are many things you will judge of on hearing them. My beloved Mother, how I would wish to add to my pains a portion of yours. I have more courage for myself than for you. I cannot resign myself to your contradictions of every kind. . . . I console myself by the thought that you have a support in the decisions which you have received. My poor Mother! Oh, how I pray for you. I dare not wish for anything for fear of desiring to follow my own lights. I leave to God the fate of our so much beloved Community.⁵

From Sister Basilide's letters Mother Theodore learned as usual many details on the school, the farm, the Community. The old musician, Mr. Hopkins, whom Monseigneur had engaged, had arrived with his family during the previous January at the farmhouse, which by the Bishop's orders had been built for them on the property at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. He began to give piano lessons at the academy, but his stay at Saint Mary's was destined to be very brief. After only a few weeks he was taken ill of pneumonia and died without baptism to the great regret of the Community. His wife, whose mastery of harp music had been thought a definite asset for the pupils of the academy, continued his work till the end of the year when she left Saint Mary's. Early in February, Marcile had arrived to supervise the work on the village church still going forward very slowly. Roquet and one man to assist him were left to com-

³ Annals. S.M.W.A.

⁴ 3 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁵ 21 février, 1844. S.M.W.A.

plete it, although owing to various disappointments as to materials, the work dragged along for almost another year.

During all the distressful weeks after the Bishop left Saint Mary's in late January no news had come to the Community from their absent Mother. They knew she had sailed from Havre in November, but they seem not to have learned that she was taking the southern route, and early in February Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote an anxious letter to New York to Madame Parmentier enclosing one for Mother Theodore. It had been many months since she had written to her family at Saint-Servan. The dire poverty at Saint Mary's made her dread the postage rates, which were still high and especially expensive for letters to Europe. She hoped that Madame Parmentier might have an opportunity to reassure her family concerning her. At last in mid-February the Community learned of their Mother's arrival at the mouth of the Mississippi. The *Nashville*, shattered and limping from the terrible storm of the week before Christmas, docked at last, as we have seen, on January 27 at New Orleans. A week later than this first news, a second letter from Sister Mary Cecilia told them of Mother Theodore's illness and the consequent postponement for an indefinite period of her arrival in Indiana.

Lent was approaching. On Quinquagesima Sunday, February 19, during the carnival days, earlier specified by the Bishop as the future date in perpetuity, the Forty Hours Devotion opened for the second time at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, offering to the Community, their pupils and the members of the frontier congregation this spiritual privilege as yet unique in the United States. Reasons for fervent supplications at the Throne of Mercy were not wanting to the sorrowing hearts at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Their Mother, absent so long, was now prostrated by another of her terrible illnesses, and as the Bishop persisted in his determination not to permit her to return, they did not know from day to day what would be her fate nor the fate of the Community.

Finally on February 27 another letter from Sister Mary Cecilia announced her own approaching return accompanied by two of the postulants and Jean Delahaye, the new gardener, but without Mother Theodore, who would hardly be able to leave New Orleans for another month. The burden placed upon the hospitality of the generous Ursulines had induced her to send her little party on to Saint Mary's retaining only Julianne Cheminant to assist in caring for her. Julianne was a sturdy and devoted Breton peasant girl of twenty-six years, who later as Sister Lawrence spent most of her religious life at Saint Augustine's Convent, Fort Wayne. There she died a martyr of charity in 1854 from cholera contracted from the victims of this terrible malady among the poor whom she was nursing. Her remains still rest today in the midst of the Catholic community of Fort Wayne for whom she gave her life.

It was only in tears and with the greatest reluctance that Sister Mary Cecilia could resign herself to leaving Mother Theodore so ill and so far from home. At last, however, she set out with the two remaining postulants and the gardener, keeping up for their sakes a pretense of cheerfulness she was far from feeling. Their steamboat met with the usual delays of the times. They were on board twenty-four hours from the time they left the convent before the boat finally steamed away from the New

Orleans pier and turned its prow up the river. Though the weather was pleasant, the trip was lengthened from the usual seven days to Evansville to eight and a half by one of the accidents which were the dread of steamboatmen. One night after retiring the travelers were roused by a loud crash, which brought the terrified passengers out of their berths in dismay. It was found that a considerable portion of the hull had been torn away by a large snag of roots and logs firmly fixed in the river. The disabled boat dragged itself to the first house along the bank where an entire day was spent repairing the damage.

The delays at the inevitable stops along the way also consumed much time. Arrived at Evansville, they had to wait two days for the stage over the dreadful corduroy road to Vincennes, leaving the box of plants they had brought and their trunks to come later when fewer passengers would give more room for baggage on the stage. The deep ooze of early spring on the roads was already preventing many from traveling, and the river was so low that no one knew when a boat could reach Vincennes. Mother Theodore had sent a box of oranges to the Sisters, a rare delicacy in those days, but Sister Mary Cecilia had to report that before reaching Evansville "all but six were spoiled." The party were received in Evansville by the hospitable Lincks, Sister Mary Magdalen's parents, at their hotel at First and Locust Streets, the Mansion House. They had visited Saint Mary-of-the-Woods the previous year but only after Mother Theodore's departure for France. Mrs. Linck's first question to Sister Mary Cecilia, "Are you Mother Theodore?" was an error which the embarrassed young Sister was very quick to rectify. At last on Saturday, February 24, at two o'clock in the morning she shepherded aboard the stage her group of three, none of whom could speak a word of English, and they jolted forward north to Vincennes.

Here, when she and her little party presented themselves at the yellow house on Market Street, where the Sisters of Providence had been maintaining their school and themselves in the direst poverty since the previous December, she received the welcome traditional for the bearer of ill tidings. Already so uneasy upon Mother Theodore's account, the Sisters viewed her arrival alone at Vincennes with consternation and coldness.

O my good Mother, she wrote to Mother Theodore, how I have suffered from arriving here alone. It is as I expected. No one approached me; I had to go round and ask them to bid me welcome. Sister Saint Vincent was so disappointed that I thought she would faint. She said several times, "Why did you not bring Mother?" When I finally made her understand that you were too sick to come, she said, "Then why did you not stay with her? You will be scolded at Saint Mary's, at Jasper, and everywhere you will be blamed for leaving her." My poor heart was so full that I could hardly keep back the tears. . . . At night when I went to bed I would have been most willing to exchange my place for any night we had on the Nashville. Of course I have seen the Bishop. . . . As for his six thousand francs, you will be obliged to give them to him. He is so displeased. He says you left your money with Mr. Lottin and have made use of his, and he will not permit it. He will have his own money. My Mother, your presence is needed at Saint Mary's in the most distressing manner. You must come without delay as soon as you can travel. The way you are wanted is enough to make one *folle*. There are a hundred things which must be regulated at once which cannot await any delay. So do come. . . .

As soon as the first disappointment wore off, Sister Saint Vincent was very nice to me. She treated me with great kindness and continues to do so. She is really good, and she wants to see you so much that she can hardly contain herself. She is distressed over the troubles of the Community. As she is of your opinion and spoke to me freely, I also spoke confidentially to her. I am convinced that if our house is not destroyed it will be violently shaken. . . . O my dear Mother, I am so distressed that I can hardly write, and I am sure you will not be able to read this letter.⁶

Further details of her visit to the Bishop omitted in this letter have come down to us from other sources. When His Lordship lauded Sister Basilide's administration and attacked Mother Theodore with the heat and sharpness which the very mention of her name invariably brought forth at this time, Sister Mary Cecilia could not be shaken in her loyalty and devotion to her maligned superior. Witness and companion of Mother Theodore's year of hardships and suffering in France, she more than any one else knew the injustice of the Bishop's attitude toward her, and she frankly made known to him "the sentiments of respect and attachment she felt for her superior."⁷ Her courageous refusal to be influenced against Mother Theodore was deeply resented by the Bishop. He considered it the result of her stay at Ruillé, where she had been prejudiced against him. Her visit brought to light one important fact however that he was taking no positive steps against Mother Theodore. For months Bishop de la Hailandière had declared that he would never allow her to come up the river. Now, inexplicably, he made no attempt to warn her away from his diocese where he knew she could be expected to arrive at almost any time.

As soon as it was learned at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods that Sister Mary Cecilia and her party had reached Vincennes, Sister Anastasie's father, Aloysius Brown, set out in his wagon to transport the travelers and their baggage to the motherhouse. He made the trip in six days, and on March 7, Sister Saint Francis Xavier could note in the diary, "Our Sisters arrive from France bringing various effects." The Sisters at Saint Mary's were busily engaged under her direction painting a banner for Father Lumiere in Terre Haute when the weary travelers at last reached home. "Our Sisters received us very affectionately, though they were very much disappointed not to see you," wrote Sister Cecilia in a letter which shortly after her arrival she sent to await Mother Theodore at Vincennes. "I had to make great efforts to appear happy, for though I was delighted to see them all again, I could not forget that you were not with us. . . . It seems to be a different Community without you."⁸

Her letter was not written till nearly a week after her arrival, and as she had begun at once to make herself useful by teaching at the academy, she had had time to look about a bit, and she wrote some details of the house and the personnel. She found "the place in good condition, neat and clean, thanks to Sister Olympiade. The postulants look happy and seem very united. Sister Saint Francis is perfectly pleased with them. Though she has had much anxiety, she is not greatly changed in appear-

⁶ Vincennes, 26 février, 1844. S.M.W.A.

⁷ Annals. S.M.W.A.

⁸ 13 mars, 1844. S.M.W.A.

ance, not thinner nor paler than when we left." The two Sisters of Charity, whom the Bishop had induced to leave their Community to enter at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods during Mother Theodore's absence, had proved now, however, to be a great source of consolation. They "give great satisfaction. They are irreproachable in their conduct and consequently have gained the affection and good graces of Sister Basilide and Sister Saint Francis Xavier. From the little I have seen of them, they seem models in everything."⁹

Sister Mary Cecilia was under observation herself. She was not free from some evident traces of American independence, and "cette Indienne," as she sometimes heard herself called at Ruillé, had not always met with the approval of the observing French superiors. It had not been altogether without reason that Mother Theodore had wished her to be for sometime under the salutary discipline of the French novitiate. With the all-embracing charity of the saints, she loved all her American and French daughters, despite their faults, but before Sister Mary Cecilia quitted Ruillé, where Mother Theodore had left her during much of their stay in France, Mother Mary took the young American novice aside and with a few charitable remarks of unmistakable character however, pointed out to her the defects which had been noticed in her personality. Sister Mary Cecilia listened respectfully and had the good sense to appreciate the recommendations and put them into execution. Sister Saint Francis Xavier remarked naively that on her return she was found to be greatly improved.

Sister Basilide expressed herself as greatly pleased with Jean Delahaye, who was a trained and experienced gardener, able to render intelligent service such as the frontier could rarely offer. Jean himself may not have been at once satisfied with his new position and duties, handicapped as he was by his ignorance of the language and customs of the country. "Jean would hardly stay if you were not coming,"¹⁰ wrote Sister Mary Cecilia. The anxiety they all felt regarding Mother Theodore and the future of the Community appears at the end of her letter: "I am so anxious about you. I long to have you come. I fear for your interview with the Bishop. I pray much for you, hoping that God will inspire both of you what to say and what to do."¹¹

During these weeks of distress, when Mother Theodore's fate hung in the balance and when distress of mind, absence, and illness were keeping her on the cross, the excellent priest whom a kind Providence had given to the struggling Community as its only friend and guide during the dark days of her long absence, seems to have realized with increasing dismay upon what a thorny path he had set his feet. "Mr. Corbe is always quiet," wrote Sister Mary Cecilia. "I do not know whether he was glad to see me or not."¹² Some premonition seems to have come to him during this time of the sorrows and perplexities of the coming years, which would devolve upon him if he remained the chaplain and confessor of the

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

harassed Community. If he could withdraw now, how much more peaceful his future lot. He was devoted to his fellow priests, he loved the life of a missionary, and it was hardly to bury himself in the woods as chaplain of a poor group of religious women that he had come to Indiana. Despite his scholarly tastes and pursuits, his solitude at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was very irksome at times, and the fear and uncertainty which were rife in the Community weighed upon his spirits. He was still, as Sister Saint Francis Xavier tells us,¹³ considered by the Bishop as his best friend, and in his capacity as chaplain he interpreted the Bishop's wishes from time to time to the Community. To him had been confided the long letter on the Bishop's rights to be read to the Sisters but never given into their possession. Father Corbe also knew of his determination to expel Mother Theodore from the Community and the diocese, although this fact was now becoming a matter of general knowledge. Sister Saint Francis attributed to Father Corbe her preservation from a similar fate during Mother Theodore's absence. He had not yet, however, definitely resolved to cast in his lot for better or for worse with the suffering Community, as he did so wholeheartedly later, and he was still the Bishop's intermediary in what must have often been to him painful circumstances, as when the ornaments contributed by friends in France for the Sisters' chapel were taken for the parish church, even Bertaudière's Madonna and candlesticks, the monstrance sent from Fougères by the ladies of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's brother, Abbé Alphonse Le Fer's parish, and the chalice given by Mr. Dupont, the Holy Man of Tours.

Despite his uncertainty, Father Corbe it was, eventually, as Sister Saint Francis records,¹⁴ of whom Divine Providence made use to pave the way for Mother Theodore's return to Saint Mary's. Sister Basilide, who had perceived a change in his attitude toward the Community, was now writing long and detailed letters to Mother Theodore at every opportunity, and she availed herself of the spaces at top and bottom of the blank outside page of Sister Mary Cecilia's letter, which could be written upon as they were folded over first and were concealed when the address and seal were added. Separate envelopes did not come into use till the 1850's, and all the Sisters' letters of these years have the address on the back, the amount of postage marked in ink, and words torn off unavoidably where the seal had to be broken. The postage on these letters from Evansville and Vincennes to New Orleans was twenty-five cents, from Terre Haute to Vincennes ten cents. It could be paid at either end. Among other details Sister Basilide inserted one reference to Father Corbe which added to Mother Theodore's countless sources of anxiety the fear of losing this capable and exemplary priest.

No open change in the Bishop's attitude was yet discernible. Father Corbe, however, must have been doubtful that Bishop de la Hailandière would carry out his designs against Mother Theodore. Late in February, after Sister Mary Cecilia and her party had arrived at Vincennes, he wrote to the Foundress at New Orleans another of the warning letters, several of which had already reached her from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, urging

¹³ Annals, Book 13, p. 14. S.M.W.A.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

her to act with great deference and caution toward His Lordship on the occasion of their first meeting. "His Lordship's resolution seemed firm," continues Sister Saint Francis Xavier's narrative in the *Annals*.¹⁵ "He repeated, 'If the Mother does not sign the articles which I will present to her, she shall not return to Saint Mary's.' We knew that our Mother would not sign anything contrary to her conscience. Father Corbe began to fear the fatal consequence of the Bishop's projects."¹⁶

Sister Basilide had been urging Mother Theodore in her letters to send for her to act as intermediary with the Bishop. Father Corbe was opposed to this arrangement, and as his influence with him was still strong, "He wrote to his Lordship that he did not think Sister Basilide's services would be necessary to negotiate peace, nor did he think she would be of any utility in Vincennes when Mother Theodore arrived. God blessed these few words and was touched by the prayers which we addressed to Him incessantly for our poor Congregation."¹⁷ Events were thus taking on a more favorable aspect, and the harassed hearts at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods began to hope.

Meanwhile in New Orleans after Sister Mary Cecilia's departure in mid-February, Mother Theodore's only link with Saint Mary's was the letters she received, few as they were perforce, owing to the delays of the time when every letter had to be mailed in Terre Haute and the answers called for there.

Her journal¹⁸ tells with what burning anxiety she longed to be among her daughters of the woods. It was with the greatest reluctance that she had sent Sister Mary Cecilia away, and only the certainty of the length of her own illness induced her to part with her. She wrote to the Community at Saint Mary's repeatedly, but they were too uncertain of the time of her departure to risk more letters to New Orleans. Letters from both Sister Basilide and Sister Saint Francis were awaiting her in Evansville and Vincennes. Two of Sister Mary Cecilia's letters reached Mother Theodore before she left New Orleans. Of all the communications she had received since her arrival in Louisiana, the most alarming was the one written by Sister Mary Cecilia from Vincennes,¹⁹ alarming less for the details it contained than for the fact that it was evidently concealing some other important and distressing circumstances. Read and reread, as it must have been, by its recipient during the enforced leisure of illness, its purport became no clearer. We know, however, what as yet Mother Theodore was unaware of, that it was under the painful impression of learning from Sister Saint Vincent that their much loved superior would probably never see Saint Mary-of-the-Woods again, that the grief-stricken young Sister had written her distressing letter.

Mother Theodore was a born leader, a *maîtresse-femme* in every sense of the word. Her Sisters read it in the calm and steady gaze of her dark eyes, in the quiet courage with which she met the ordinary and extraor-

¹⁵ Book 13, p. 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *J. and L.*, pp. 146-180.

¹⁹ See p. 319.

dinary difficulties with which her position in America was beset from the very inception of the Indiana mission. She was facing now, she knew, one of the crises in her career, but she looked straight into the threatening future with a trust born of her unalterable confidence in Divine Providence. Who if not the daughters of Providence should be distinguished by this trust? She was endowed by nature with both physical and moral courage of a high order, and the mental paralysis of fear seems to have had no grip upon her personality. Like her great patroness, Saint Teresa, there seemed in this respect nothing feminine about her. Saint Teresa points out that courage is the prime essential for lofty sanctity, and it stands out in bright relief in every facet of the noble character of the Foundress of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Mother Cecilia, who was probably a little less intrepid, admired this quality and singled it out in her manuscript life of the Foundress for special mention with her other characteristics, her all pervading love of God, her amiability and gaiety, her charity and kindness of heart. "She could nerve herself to anything." No incident in her entire career was perhaps more characteristic or more revealing than the descent on the rope ladder from the *Cincinnati* to the skiff in New York Bay on their first arrival in America, and no words of their beloved Foundress are more treasured today by her daughters than her courageous whisper to the terrified Sisters as she went first over the side of the ship, "Sisters, if we must die, let us die and say nothing."

This readiness to assume the brunt of every difficulty was no doubt in large measure the secret of her remarkable ascendancy over the Community. She was always first in every painful or laborious undertaking. In the grilling labor of the fields, which the Sisters undertook perforce from time to time, in shucking the corn and gathering the fruit, she was always at the head of the group of postulants and Sisters. Courageous herself, she expected this attitude and instilled it almost unconsciously. She thus trained a generation of simple, trustful Sisters, unafraid of suffering and trials, and ashamed in the atmosphere created by their noble-hearted Mother to count their crosses. Her physical courage was well known. She never hesitated in the early days of poverty to drive a skittish or tricky horse to Terre Haute hitched to the little two-seated buggy on a business trip, rather than take a workman for a day from the fields or the orchard.

Some of her eminent qualities had been developed by experience. Accustomed from early youth to responsibility, at first in the supervision of her own home after her father's tragic death, later as local superior for seventeen years in France, she carried the burden of authority unassumingly and unconsciously, meeting her heavy trials with the direct advance of the perfectly balanced mind. Far from being unfeeling or stoical, however, often when some new cross appeared, especially during *les années de nos épreuves*²⁰ she showed the painful impact of the blow by her stricken look and her silent bowing to the Will of God before her native courage and her trust in Providence rose to her aid. This sensitive heart it was which at moments of acute mental suffering, the crucial points in the early history of the Community, reacted upon her frail physique and

²⁰ The years of our trials.

plunged her into the critical illnesses which often had their real *raison d'être* in the moral shock she had received.

Her heroic disregard of personal danger and her fortitude had however no affiliation with the callous indifference which ignores the sorrows and sufferings of others. She had the precious gift for a superior, a tender and compassionate heart. Her Sisters, their pupils and friends, even chance acquaintances, and the dumb animals, "our horse Mignon," "that naughty Finette," "our dog Taillard," and his later successor, "Mother Theodore's dog, Miller," all had her sympathy and help. The postulants wrote to her to France, as we have seen, that the yellow cat had pined away in her absence. This loving care, especially for her Sisters, they chose of all her qualities to immortalize in the words written upon the white cross which marked her resting place in the convent cemetery, "I sleep but my heart watches over this house which I have founded."

Despite her brave and magnanimous heart, however, Mother Theodore seems not to have been entirely free from that form of fear which Saint Thomas fittingly calls *agonia*, anxiety, the grilling travail of the mind mulling over a misfortune by its very nature impossible of solution in the present, unpredictable in the future. Too many human souls were involved in the survival of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, their happiness, their future, even perhaps their salvation. Now when she was on her way to she knew not what in Vincennes, uncertainty, cruelest of mental torments, complicated her distress. Her own words tell us this: "I was burning with anxiety." Then after Sister Mary Cecilia's departure she was alone with no one to whom she could communicate her fears and uneasiness. "I have been compelled to let my dear companion depart with the others of our little band. I can now say that I am poor, indeed, for she was my last treasure. May this final sacrifice be pleasing to God," she wrote to Canon Lottin.²¹ This young Sister, still a novice, was now entirely cognizant of the difficulties of the Community, and Mother Theodore felt she could rely unfailingly upon her discretion and loyalty. Sister Basilide did not altogether approve of reposing so much confidence in so young a Sister, nor did the Bishop, who saw in her devotedness to Mother Theodore a personal affront from the motherhouse at Ruillé.

Mother Theodore's departure from the hospitable South, however, was now only a question of days. The physician who had declared that it would mean certain death for her to go earlier, was now willing to allow her to leave, and Saint Joseph's day was fixed for her departure. After assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and listening to a discourse on the virtues and prerogatives of this great saint, one of the special patrons of her Community, she embarked, weak and depleted, and hardly able to stand, yet summoning all her courage and confidence in God. With regret she bade adieu to the gracious and hospitable Ursulines, whose kindness and care had softened the pain of her long illness.

The port of New Orleans, owing to the development of steamboat navigation, which was nearing its peak in the 1840's, was at this time a close rival of New York. Many travelers have left descriptions of the steamboat centers of the times, the double and triple tiers of boats at

²¹ 14 février, 1844. S.M.W.A.

the levée with final cargo loads from the great drays drawn by struggling horses going aboard and the sharp bark of orders to Negro stevedores and roustabouts, passengers hurrying up the gang plank to the sound of clanging bells and the sharp hiss of escaping steam. This bedlam was ever and anon punctuated by the sudden boom from the whistles of departing steamers. Mother Theodore counted thirty steamboats coming and going and other vessels of every conceivable size and purpose manned by strange looking sailors from every quarter of the globe. "The air was darkened by clouds of their smoke," remarked the Foundress, "the noise . . . surpassed belief."²² A great variety of steamboats appeared on the Mississippi, but the fast New Orleans to Evansville and Louisville boats were elegant and roomy vessels with excellent accommodations and good food. "On board the steamer," wrote Mother Theodore, "which is at least two hundred feet long and equipped for two thousand passengers, I looked upon the moving panorama exhibited around this first river in the world."²³

An American invention, the steamboats responded so completely to the needs of the West that they multiplied and grew more numerous here than in all the rest of the world. Owing to the varying depth of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, which from one hundred and fifty feet at New Orleans shrank ordinarily to thirty or forty feet at flood seasons on the Ohio and one third of that or less during the summer and early autumn, these large boats were almost flat bottomed. Wood replenished from great quantities stacked at intervals along the bank was the only fuel, its blue smoke charged with dangerous sparks pouring from the funnels. The fastest steamer on the river in 1844 was the *Sultana*, which made the New Orleans-Louisville trip in something over five days.

The water was high on the Mississippi in March, 1844, and the boat which carried our travelers made excellent time. Their fares, including the stage to Vincennes, as the item appeared later carefully noted by Mother Theodore in her accounts, amounted to \$17.33 for each one. No untoward event delayed them. Three times daily, for breakfast at half past seven, dinner at noon, and supper at six, the motley throng of passengers gathered at the table d'hôte meals with democratic promiscuity, ignorant or oblivious of the class distinctions in dress and rank which characterized European society. Nowhere perhaps more than on her frequent journeyings upon the steamboats of the western rivers did Mother Theodore remark this republican indifference to wealth and station. Women were universally respected, but birth and, as yet, wealth also meant nothing, and only to men of eminent and well known talent would the liberty loving Americans cede place and honor.

As their boat steamed rapidly northward upon the sinuous chocolate colored river, there unrolled before the eyes of the two travelers mile after mile of flat banks and bayous. The dark cypress trees fringing the river supported a waving screen of Spanish moss, "a vine from fifteen to eighteen feet long of an ashy green, its filaments no thicker than a thread hanging from the trees."²⁴ This moss had interested Mother Theodore

²² *J. and L.*, p. 166.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

from her first arrival in Louisiana, and from her sick bed she had sent by Father Ernest Audran, one of Bishop de la Hailandière's nephews, who passed through New Orleans on his way to France, a little Chinese basket of Spanish moss and pecans, "a species of American nut," to the Countess de Marescot at home in France. "This moss is peculiar to Louisiana and is used for mattresses. I am writing from a bed of moss. It covers the trees along the Mississippi and falls almost to the ground like long hair. Before being dried it is of an ashy color. When dried it drops the outer covering."²⁵

Sweeping southward in great curves, the winding river unwound its phenomenal length, with its constantly changing contours, its treacherous snags and sandbars, its floating islands of driftwood. The levees built gradually to restrain the two yearly rises of the waters in June and December sometimes raised the river above the level of the fields. Mother Theodore had remarked this circumstance in New Orleans, and she shared the general erroneous opinion which attributed to this fact the recurrent malaria and the dreaded yellow fever, which periodically ravaged the river towns as far north as Memphis. Though they were known to abate in cold weather, it was not till 1898 that American physicians in Cuba proved the deadly tropical *stegomyia* mosquito to be the carrier of yellow fever.

The long days on board were pleasant in the main. Despite her weakness, which kept her below during part of the time, Mother Theodore was on deck as much as possible enjoying the changeful beauty of the river and pointing out to Julianne the glories of shore and sky and water. Southern vegetation, magnolias, palmettos, and orange trees bordered the river as far north as Baton Rouge, and sugar plantations surrounding the handsome classic mansions of planters which fringed both banks. Groups of slaves toiled in the fields, and at evening their gay laughter and soft melodious songs stole across the river from their cabins. On the west the Red River poured its dark red flood into the muddy Mississippi. Farther on the travelers passed Natchez on a high bluff surrounded by orange trees and cotton fields, and Vicksburg with imposing hills in the environs.

The transition from the semi-tropical vegetation and the soft air of the South became hourly more marked as they steamed rapidly northward. "We had hardly spent two days on the steamboat when the spring weather enjoyed at New Orleans was gone. The fragrant fruit and flowers were succeeded by majestic trees still bare of foliage. The farther north we went, the lower became the temperature and the bleaker the landscape."²⁶ Past the light red surge of the Arkansas River and Memphis on its eminence they steamed on, and leaving the low shore at Cairo on the left, swept into the clear waters of the Ohio, the *belle rivière* of the early explorers. Here the sharp winds of a western early spring tossed the bare branches of the forest trees along the bank and ruffled the smooth waters.

Indiana, the longed-for goal of so many anxious weeks was in sight at last, and thanksgiving to God filled Mother Theodore's grateful heart to overflowing. She had come up the river after all without mishap, and

²⁵ A. M. Lottin, 14 février, 1844. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ *J. and L.*, p. 166.

God's Providence, "guide in every danger," would watch over them for the final stage of their journey. It was now too cold to sit on deck, but even the sharp winds were welcome as they showed that the travelers were nearing home.

This severe change was sweet to me, for it meant I was nearing home. Finally, on the fifth day with inexpressible joy I saw once more my Indiana. I would have loved to kiss its soil. This land was no longer for me the land of exile; it was the portion of my inheritance, and in it I hope to dwell all the days of my life. I saluted the Guardian Angels of Indiana and prayed them to take the souls of these poor people under their protection, especially those whom we are called upon to benefit.²⁷

The familiar hardwood trees, the giant sycamores, oaks, and walnuts hedged the Ohio to the juncture with their own Wabash pouring forth the very dark green waters which had flowed past the bluffs and bottoms of Vigo County. They continued on, however, another fifty miles to step ashore at the busy river port of Evansville on a great bend of the spring-swollen Ohio. The town, which had suffered heavily in the financial panic of 1837, was, in 1844, beginning to struggle back to security. Destitution, however, was still apparent everywhere. "Had I not already known that I was in Indiana, in the diocese of Vincennes, I might have guessed it from the extreme poverty that surrounded us."²⁸ The Wabash and Erie Canal was then creeping slowly southward to its terminus at Evansville, but almost ten years were to elapse before it would reach the city, and the railroad by that time had already spelled its doom. The travelers were nearing their journey's end. "Toward midnight [on March 24], we reached Evansville, one of the largest cities in Indiana. The father of one of our novices [Francis X. Linck], came to meet us and took us to his house. The next day, feast of the Annunciation, we had the happiness of receiving the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. O Mary, my good Mother, be thou forever blest for thy tender protection. Again on one of thy feasts do I receive new favors from God."²⁹

Catholicism had, even in Bishop Bruté's time, taken root in Evansville, though anti-Catholic prejudice had reached the nadir of infamy in the same tragic year of 1844 when Mother Theodore passed through the city, in the condemnation and imprisonment of the innocent young Alsatian priest, Roman Weinzoepfeln, who only thirteen days earlier had been incarcerated in the penitentiary at Jeffersonville. We have already met the devoted pioneer Catholic, Francis X. Linck, Mother Theodore's host on this and other occasions. The first Catholic in Evansville, he was discovered by the three young ecclesiastics, Father Buteux, Benjamin Petit, and Michael Shawe, whom Bishop Bruté in mid-August in 1836 had detached from his party of missionaries returning with him from France to conduct their baggage from Pittsburgh down the Ohio to Evansville, and Father Buteux said Mass in his house next day. The first Mass celebrated in Evansville by the newly-ordained pastor, the Reverend Anthony Deydier, on May 4, 1837, took place in the Mansion House at

²⁷ *J. and L.*, p. 167.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

the northwest corner of First and Locust streets, the hotel maintained there for many years by Mr. Linck.

Unlike most of the Indiana missionaries, Father Deydier was not a Breton. Born in Auvergne in 1788, he came to America with Fathers Flaget, Bruté, Mr. Guy Chabrat, and others in August, 1810, at the age of twenty-two years. He had made brilliant theological studies in France at the Seminary of Saint Flour and had received the diaconate in 1812 at Saint Mary's Seminary, Baltimore. He had been a professor for four years at Mount Saint Mary's, Emmitsburg, without advancing to the priesthood. After 1816 for twenty years, being an accomplished musician, he taught music in Albany, New York.³⁰ Ordained on March 25, 1837, in Vincennes, when long past his prime, Father Deydier was appointed almost at once the first resident pastor of Evansville, where his life of poverty, self-abnegation, and devoted service of his flock were the edification of Catholics and Protestants alike for twenty-two years. Mother Theodore describes in these reverent words the destitution in which he lived:

On coming out of the brick church, whose only ornament was bare walls, we were taken by a Catholic lady to the priest's house. He was absent, but we pushed open a door and entered a room, if room it could be called, about eight or nine feet square. An unpainted wooden chest served as a table. The good lady showed me the inside of it. There I beheld the bed of the servant of God. Before the church was built, he offered the Adorable Sacrifice on this same board. A few books, English and French, a wooden chair, and a little stove constituted all the furnishings. On the stove was a cast-iron pan in which he baked his corn bread, his only article of food, of which he partakes but once a day.³¹

This was not, however, Mother Theodore's first contact with the saintly Apostle of Evansville. She took him to be about twenty-eight years of age, but in reality he was almost fifty-five and had spent six years in heroic efforts to organize and minister to the Catholic people and to build his brick church dedicated in honor of the Assumption of our Lady. Repeated collecting trips to the East had assisted him materially in his work, and nearly four years previously Mother Theodore's friend, Bishop Forbin-Janson, had laid the cornerstone of his church. When she had met Father Deydier on her way to Vincennes in 1840, his ragged appearance, his unvarnished account of his hardships, and the sight of the log hut which served as church, house, and school had saddened the hearts of the Sisters then unaccustomed to the sacrifices of missionary life. Learning before she left the city of his urgent need of ornaments and furnishings for his church, Mother Theodore registered a resolution to share with the needy Catholics of Evansville the sacred articles collected with so much labor in France. "We will try to help him, as thanks to our dear brothers in France we are almost rich in devotional articles."³²

But one day, the feast of the Annunciation, was spent in Evansville. Next morning, still accompanied by Julienne, she set out on the last stage but one of the long journey, the fifty-five mile stage trip over the dreaded

³⁰ Cauthorn, *History of Saint Francis Xavier Cathedral, Vincennes*, p. 166; J. W. Ruane, "The Beginnings of the Society of Saint Sulpice in the United States (1791-1829)" Catholic University Dissertation, 1935, p. 65.

³¹ *J. and L.*, p. 168.

³² *Ibid.*

corduroy road to Vincennes, "through those magnificent forests traversed so often by Bishop Bruté in visiting his flock."³³ Still convalescent from her illness, she found the hours of jolting in the stage coach particularly painful. Anxious thoughts, too, mingled with the customary whispered prayers, which called the blessing of God upon all her undertakings. She was now within a few hours of the solution of Sister Mary Cecilia's letter, within a few hours of discovering the reason for the urgent need of her presence in Indiana. One count against her in the Bishop's mind she knew, the assertion that, as he said, she had "stolen his money." The rest she was all too soon to discover. He was not, however, in need of funds, as he had probably received the twenty thousand francs secured by Father Chassé from the Propagation of the Faith three months earlier.

At sunset the cross-tipped spire of the Cathedral of Vincennes came into view and at "early candlelighting" in the picturesque phrase of the time, Mother Theodore stood before the portal of the yellow house, at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets,³⁴ purchased by the Bishop the previous autumn and occupied as school and convent by the Sisters ever since. From within she heard the familiar murmur of the evening Rosary, then the door opened, and she tasted again after the long months of absence the joys of a mother come home to her own. The Sisters hastily gathered about her with affectionate greetings taking her heavy broadcloth mantle and outdoor veil, and noting in the uncertain candlelight with sudden tears how crushed she was with fatigue, how thin and pale from her long illness. They hovered around her with eager affection, and her tenderness and gaiety despite her weariness charmed them and touched their hearts. When she sat down at the head of the table for seven o'clock supper in their little refectory, her quick eyes noted with pain the destitution they bore so cheerfully: "They had neither a glass nor a table napkin for me, and the sum of the delicacies they could set before me was a little corned beef. But what of that? We did not even notice it."³⁵

Then at last the young Sisters, Sister Mary Magdalen, Sister Philomene, and Sister Stanislaus, tiptoeing away, Mother Theodore could have a few minutes alone with Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer. Only then did she learn of the Bishop's decree against her. All her courage and resignation were needed to meet this new and heavy cross, totally unsuspected by her, though known for months to the clergy of the diocese and now, through the domestics who overheard the conversation at the Bishop's table, the subject of general gossip in the village of Vincennes, that she was to be deposed, dismissed from her Congregation, and driven from the diocese. "Sister Saint Vincent explained the enigma of Sister Mary Cecilia's letter which gave no details. The Bishop had said positively that he did not wish me to return to Saint Mary's. This was a very painful blow. I had not expected it. It had never occurred to me that Monseigneur intended to prevent my seeing the Sisters again since he had allowed me to return to Indiana."³⁶ Sister Saint Vincent, despite her grief, had become so accustomed to the thought that she had no idea that

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Now Main Street.

³⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 168.

³⁶ A Mgr. Bouvier, 25 juin, 1844. S.M.W.A.

this decision was not to all intents and purposes a reality, and she begged Mother Theodore to go back to Saint Mary's for a few days as a visitor. This measure the harassed superior refused to consider even for an instant. Sleep came to her late, if at all, that night, but the morning brought strength from the only Source where it is never sought in vain. "The next day after hearing Mass and seeking in Holy Communion the strength needed, grieved but calm and submissive, and accompanied by Sister Vincent, I went to see the Bishop."⁸⁷

Trembling with physical weakness and oppressed with apprehension and sorrow, yet as she said, calm and resigned, Mother Theodore stood before Monseigneur de la Hailandière in his study, probably the very room in the present cathedral rectory where amid other relics of the past his portrait, with those of his predecessor and successors in the episcopacy looks down today from the walls. The momentous interview upon which turned the fate of the Sisters of Providence in Indiana, perhaps even in America, lasted for two hours. Neither the principal participant, Bishop de la Hailandière, nor the sole spectator, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, has left any record of it. A detailed account has come down, however, from Mother Theodore herself in the closely written pages of a letter to Bishop Bouvier dated some two months later. At first the Bishop ignored the presence of the two Sisters, but "finally obliged to say something, he began to load me," recorded Mother Theodore, "with the gravest and bitterest reproaches about things which I heard in astonishment; for not only did he relate to me under the blackest colors all that I had in the past said and proposed to the Council, but also a number of other things that I had never even thought of."⁸⁸

Sister Basilide he praised in no measured terms.

He added that he liked that Sister, but as for the other proud little thing (he would not even pronounce the name of Sister Saint Francis Xavier), she would have to leave immediately, or at least, not have anything whatever to do in our affairs, else he would give up everything. . . . He said that she had written against him to you, to our Mother, etc. I answered that I knew Sister Saint Francis and Sister Basilide had written certain things that everybody did not approve. . . . I told him that both Sisters seemed to be in accord when they wrote to me, but as for the information, I had received much more from Sister Basilide than from Sister Saint Francis. Moreover, the long letter that I had at New Orleans was entirely from the hand of Sister B.

His Lordship then changed the conversation to speak about the money he said I had *stolen* from him in Paris. He said I would have to refund it to him and immediately, too. I tried to explain how it was that I happened to get it. He answered there was not a word of truth in what I was saying, and so forth. How angry this good Bishop was!

Our interview lasted two hours. I was exhausted. I trembled fearing to hear the fatal order to retire forever without being allowed to see again those poor children at Saint Mary's, who were so impatiently awaiting me. I should not be able even to take to them the wherewith to get food, which I had sought for them with so much pain. All was settled! They were to get it through other hands! I asked

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

and obtained permission to retire, but His Lordship directed me to return next day. He said he was not through with me yet.³⁹

Another night of anxiety and indecision intervened before Mother Theodore's second and final interview with the Bishop, another day of supplications poured forth before the throne of the God of mercies, and during those twenty-some hours the Bishop had time to reflect. In the interval also a letter received opportunely from Father Corbe from Saint Mary's seems to have had the effect of altering the Bishop's determination, so often avowed, not to permit Mother Theodore to return to her Community.

The following day we returned and found Monseigneur a little less ill-disposed through one of the providential and loving dispositions of our God. . . . Now he treated me better, and I began to think I would be able to return to Saint Mary's. Believing the moment favorable, I asked permission to write a few words to announce my arrival. It was granted, and upon the Bishop's desk itself I wrote a note saying I would leave for Saint Mary's by the first steamboat. I added that I was writing under the eyes of His Lordship, who sent his blessing to all the Community. This letter was intended for all those Sisters who, informed of the affairs, were waiting for me to let them know the place where I would go so that they could join me there. . . .

Among the countless accusations heaped upon me, one was that I was not sick at all at New Orleans, but had remained there to plot something against my superior. The state of weakness, however, to which I was reduced was my justification. I availed myself of it to ask that nothing further be said to me about these matters and that permission be given me to leave. It was granted. The next day I was at Saint Mary's.⁴⁰

At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods the end of weeks of anxious but confident prayer was registered in two phrases in Sister Saint Francis's writing in the diary recording the arrival of Mother Theodore's letter, "God be praised! Mother is at Vincennes!" Next day, April 1, Sister Saint Francis wrote one expressive line, "Arrival of Mother Theodore at her beloved Community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods." In the Annals she gives additional details explaining the favorable issue of Mother Theodore's interview with the Bishop: "While we were still weeping over the fate of our dear Mother, we received some lines from her, 'I am writing to you in the very room of our good Bishop. He sends his blessing to you all. I will be among you nearly as soon as my letter,' etc. Father Corbe's letter had begun this happy change. Mother's frank and simple manner in explaining her conduct finished it."

The Wabash was in full "steamboatable" condition, with boats steaming several times a week to Terre Haute and even in some cases beyond. Mother Theodore could then embark at once, but this time she must go alone. Julianne, her faithful companion, must be left behind in Vincennes. The circumstances surrounding her coming to America were somewhat delicate. She had been originally engaged in a domestic capacity by Father Hardy at Fougères at the request of the Reverend Jean Pierre Bellier, Eudist president of Saint Gabriel's College, Vincennes, with whom Sister Saint Francis Xavier had traveled west in 1841. It was only after making

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Mother Theodore's acquaintance in France that Julianne had expressed a desire to join her. She was a sturdy Breton peasant girl who knew her own mind, however, and it was now after her two months close association with Mother Theodore, irrevocably made up to become a Sister of Providence if Mother Theodore would accept her. She was, however, under a definite financial obligation to Father Bellier, who had advanced the money for her passage from Havre to New Orleans. Sister Mary Cecilia had warned Mother Theodore that he would be displeased if she received Julianne. Now, however, in view of her openly expressed wish to enter the novitiate, he withdrew his opposition, but it was agreed that she should remain in service at the college for a reasonable time to recompense him for the expense he had incurred and come to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods later when he would be willing to allow her to leave. This occurred sooner than they had expected, and Mother Theodore notes Julianne's arrival at Saint Mary's on May 20, to be a lay Sister. "She will be called Sister Lawrence."⁴¹

To her regret Mother Theodore had to forego any attempt to see her missionary Sisters at Jasper and Saint Peter's before she left Vincennes. Jasper was somewhat remote and difficult of access, but Saint Peter's, near the site of the present town of Montgomery, was much nearer. The Sisters in both places had received only meager and belated details regarding their Mother, and their anxiety was acute:

What a blow! wrote Sister Saint Liguori from Saint Peter's some weeks earlier, to learn of Sister Cecilia's arrival alone! Only an hour ago indirectly we heard of this, though she must have been with our Sisters in Vincennes for ten days. Of you, dear Mother, we know nothing except that you are ill, and our Sisters' silence leaves us in the greatest uneasiness. For pity's sake, if you are still alive, give us some sign if only to write your name on a piece of paper and send it to Saint Peter's, near Washington, Daviess County, Indiana, as this has been our address since December 3.⁴²

Learning of her presence at Vincennes, the two Sisters at Saint Peter's were making every effort to join her there, but without avail: "We must, we find, make the sacrifice of seeing you despite our great need. For two days, since we learned of your arrival at Vincennes we have been looking for some means of reaching there. We found a carriage which we may have *gratis*, but impossible to secure a horse. We must then remain in our hermitage. It is truly one."⁴³

Mother Theodore's trip up the river and the carriage ride from Terre Haute across the Wabash bottoms and over the bluffs to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods consumed two entire days. She later noted the amount expended for each of the two parts of the journey, two dollars. As on the momentous October evening now two years and a half in the past, it was almost dark when she drove up to the edge of the deep ravine south of the Thralls house, where she again alighted and descended the slope to cross the little brook and climb the steep bank, no slight task in her still weakened condition. A few moments later she was once more at the

⁴¹ Community Diary.

⁴² 7 mars, 1844. S.M.W.A.

⁴³ Sister Saint Liguori à Mother Theodore, 1 avril, 1844. S.M.W.A.

humble doorway of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, clasped in the arms of her Sisters and home at long last after so many anxieties and labors and sufferings of every sort. The joy was universal. As on her first arrival, she would speak to no one till, surrounded by her daughters, she had knelt at the foot of the Tabernacle to thank with tears that "sweet and tender Providence of God" who had brought her through so many dangers, through labor and pain, through many watchings, through hunger and thirst, through fastings often, through cold and privation, back to her own Saint Mary-of-the-Woods again to register a determination to serve with renewed earnestness the cause of religion in Indiana to which her life was dedicated. It was Monday in Holy Week, and no Easter before or since ever dawned with a greater sense of happiness and peace. "At last Mother Theodore is back," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Mother Mary. "She arrived on the second of April after spending two months in her sick bed at New Orleans. The good God loves her well, for He has treated her as a true member of the Sisters of Providence, who take on their profession day Jesus Christ Crucified for their Spouse." ⁴⁴

Calm, happiness, and security now seemed theirs. The Bishop's displeasure, which had encircled them like a net of steel, was over at least for the present. He was acutely aware of his injustice toward Mother Theodore, and he expressed his penitence so often, and in such terms of humility as to embarrass her greatly. She now knew also who had caused the sufferings of the past year by her disloyalty, her imprudence, and indiscretion, but the noble heart of Mother Theodore was incapable of resentment, and Sister Basilide found in her only a mother's affectionate pardon. "This example of generosity did me more good," wrote Sister Saint Francis, "than all the dollars of America could have done." ⁴⁵ Not so with Bishop de la Hailandière. He turned upon poor Sister Basilide the crushing weight of his anger. As superior of the Community he demanded her exclusion from the Council "accusing her among other things of being on the point of destroying the Congregation." ⁴⁶

Though she was still only convalescent, Mother Theodore's first concern was to remedy the acute poverty which she could now ameliorate, as in the phrase they loved to use, "thanks to our brothers in France," they would never suffer the same pressing need of the essentials in food and raiment again. She was now also in a position to begin to pay the debts which had weighed so heavily upon the Community for over two years. During her absence some charitable friends had trusted and helped the Community. Priscilla Thralls had shared with them her meager store of potatoes, and Cornelius Sanford, who had a grist mill north of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, had kept them in flour. Mother Theodore paid him eighty dollars, and she began at once with her usual observant care to replenish their supplies. Fifty dollars to Mr. Crawford for flour is one of the first items marked in her accounts, and "a gallon of the molasses of the country, thirty-five cents."

The workmen also, some of whom had received nothing for months,

⁴⁴ A Mère Marie, 18 avril, 1844. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Mother Theodore à Mgr. Bouvier, 25 juin, 1844. S.M.W.A.

must be paid. On this account appears the name of "notre garçon Jerry," a faithful employee of many years, Ignatius or Jerry Doyle, who eventually married Francis Thralls's daughter, Margaret, and long served the Community as carpenter and builder. Young Jacques Roquet was now married and established permanently near his wife's family, the Friels, in the vicinity of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Father Corbe had married him in 1842, and his handsome white satin wedding vest, Sister Olympiade's handiwork, is still treasured by his grandchildren. Though occupied in the main in the Bishop's employ in finishing the church, he was often able to render service when needed, and he must be paid, Coliche, too, who left shortly afterwards, and Logan Hagan, then a very young man, who stayed at Saint Mary's all his life.

Repairs were also in order as Mother Theodore detected the need. Early in April the piano required mending, perhaps with the supply of strings purchased at Sister Basilide's request in Paris. The baggage brought from Europe had already arrived in fairly good condition, and substantial sums began at once to come at intervals from France through Mr. Crawford in Terre Haute, two hundred dollars in April, three hundred in May, four hundred in June, in July one hundred. From now on the item *Reçu de notre quête*⁴⁷ recurs regularly at monthly intervals. The old wagon had to be reconditioned and a new one made for seventeen dollars. No frontier necessity was more urgent than this, and the early Sisters record that except for the Bishop's little single buggy to which Mother Theodore often drove one horse to Terre Haute, the wagon driven by Logan, "a trusty man," as Sister Mary Eudoxie later characterized him, was the main means of transportation all during Mother Theodore's lifetime.

To the immense relief and satisfaction of all, many of the old debts were paid during April and May after Mother Theodore's return: fifty dollars to Grover, one hundred to Smith and Button, thirty-two dollars to the tinner "in full." These old accounts, though out of all proportion to the anxiety and distress they had caused, are distinguished from the current expenses and in almost every case marked with a final word of relief "dette." On April 16 Mother Theodore notes a trip to Terre Haute with Sister Basilide "on business," and some weeks later she recorded a second visit to transact "business known to Sister Saint Francis with Messrs. Farrington and Crawford." Mr. Crawford, who had been only temporarily alienated from the Community during the general wave of prejudice consequent upon Sister Aloysia's defection, was now very complaisant and had shown great generosity and kindness to Sister Basilide during Mother Theodore's absence. The school which Sister Aloysia had opened with Mrs. Susan Williams, having proved unsuccessful, was closed during 1843, and she herself had left Terre Haute. Mr. Crawford's general store continued to be the Community's preferred place for ordinary supplies for many years, and all the money received from France during the next few years came through his hands.

The rapidly approaching warm weather made work on the farm of first importance as soon as Mother Theodore reached home. Plowing for

⁴⁷ Received from our collection.

oats and corn began during Easter week, and Logan had already spent by that time two weeks labor on the garden. Before April closed he had planted a generous quantity of potatoes, and corn, essential crop for man and beast on the frontier, was put in on the first of May. Fine weather insured successful crops, and the clover was specially promising. At the end of the month of May it was cut and gathered. In order to have more milk a cow was bought and four calves to serve for future needs. Other improvements of this time were a fruitery to preserve the fresh fruit for the pupils' use for the winter. Many years were to elapse before it was plentiful enough to provide for the Community also. A pharmacy to serve the constant dispensing of remedies to the people of the countryside was another improvement at this period. Under Mother Theodore's skilled direction Sister Olympiade presided over the first log cabin erected a few feet from the log chapel near the edge of the ravine where the summer-house now stands, and stocked with tisanes, simple remedies, and herbs. It was a source of great help and security and did much good for many years.

As soon as possible after her return, Mother Theodore turned to fulfill her engagements made during the storm at sea. She had a little log chapel erected in honor of Saint Anne on a knoll in the forest to the east of the convent where two ravines formed a natural eminence. A wild grape vine made it a bower of leafy beauty in spring and summer. Sister Maurice has left a sketch. After some thirty years the logs began to give way, and in 1876 a substantial stone structure replaced the original chapel. Sister Mary Joseph Le Fer had the unique idea of lining the interior with the beautiful iridescent river shells. Many expeditions by the novices to the wide sandbar at Durkee's Ferry (now Tecumseh) netted an abundance of various kinds, and Sister Mary Joseph, though her health was already failing, took an active part in the work of placing the shells. She drew the designs and directed the novices in placing the shells on the freshly plastered walls prepared in sections. The built-in altar, too, was decorated with the shells and Mother Theodore's statue of Saint Anne was placed above and behind the tabernacle.

During over a hundred years the isolated occasions when rain has prevented the yearly procession promised by the Foundress in honor of Saint Anne escape the memory. For this second chapel Sister Mary Basile O'Donnell wrote the words for the colorful melody, which sung at twilight near the chapel in the forest was cherished in memory by every daughter of Mother Theodore. Devotion to Saint Anne has been zealously guarded in the Community as an heirloom. She is the only Saint after Our Lady and Saint Joseph who has the honor of a special altar in the beautiful convent church, and there on the feast of Our Lady's Nativity appears the recumbent statue of the Infant Mary secured by Sister Euphrasie in Rome in 1922. Saint Anne's pretty banner has its place in all the major processions of the year, and her feast day both at home and on mission is one of the gala days of the vacation especially for the novices, who appear on that day at High Mass in the transept of the convent church which ordinarily during the vacation months they leave to the mission Sisters. The procession each year seems to gain in solemnity and

beauty, many of the neighboring clergy joining with the Community to make it so. To Mother Theodore the fulfillment of her promises to Saint Anne had been a joy.

Events of considerable import for the diocese also were scheduled during the spring of 1844. Father Martin, president of the seminary at Vincennes, arrived at Saint Mary's on April 20, accompanied by his five seminarians who were to spend the summer there. The Wabash had been rising for some time, and by mid-June the river bottom between Terre Haute and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was completely flooded, thus isolating the Community almost completely. The winding road across the bottom was impassable, and in early July Mother Theodore went to Terre Haute by way of Macksville over the present route through West Terre Haute. But even there the water was nearly a foot deep in the carriage. Father Martin had come from Vincennes in a wagon. Immediately afterwards both he and Father Corbe left for the ecclesiastical retreat and the synod, which would assemble the priests of the diocese at Vincennes for ten days.

Father Corbe's stay was, however, much longer and the Community and the parish were deprived of Mass all during May, even on the feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost. Father Vincent Baquelin, en route to Vincennes, said Mass for them on Saint Mark's day and gave them Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and a sermon. On their return from Vincennes, Fathers Lalumiere and Delaune visited Saint Mary's giving Benediction and a short exhortation. They remained to celebrate Mass on Sunday for the Community and the congregation. This devoted friend, Father Lalumiere, was back again on the twenty-third to hear the Sisters' confessions and to give again the precious consolations of Mass and Holy Communion. On May 30 Father Corbe returned from Vincennes, and that evening after the Rosary as was long customary, the *Veni Creator* was chanted in the chapel for the formal opening of the novitiate for Jane Brown, whom Mother Theodore had named Sister Anastasie. A general Communion and Benediction next day closed the month of May.

Another of Mother Theodore's first cares after her arrival was to see the Sisters and postulants individually, inquiring with loving care into the material and spiritual well-being of each one. This accomplished, her heart reached out to the Sisters on the missions. She had seen the little Community at Vincennes, but the Jasper Sisters, Sister Marie Joseph and Sister Gabriella, she had not seen since they left Saint Mary's in March, 1842, over two years before. They were still novices, though the time for Sister Marie Joseph's profession was long past, and she was the local superior. Both Sisters had missed the annual retreat during two consecutive summers. The mission of Saint Peter's, where Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine had been sent by the Bishop some four months earlier, Mother Theodore had never seen. The Sisters were urging her to come, but she hesitated, fearing to provoke again the displeasure with which the Bishop had previously looked upon her wish to fulfill this point of the Rule which required the visitation of the houses.

A visit to Vincennes might obviate the difficulty, and as soon as he arrived there, Father Corbe sent her a few lines urging her to bring Sister Olympiade and come to Vincennes for another interview with the Bishop.

She left Saint Mary's on the first of May and was most graciously and kindly received by His Lordship. She gave the details of her visit to Bishop Bouvier:

Arrived at Vincennes I went to see His Lordship. He could not have been more friendly. He wished again to make excuses to me. I assured him that that was not necessary, that very candidly I had forgotten the past, that it was even impossible for me to think of anything personal when I saw the existence of our poor little house so seriously compromised. I added that we would ask but one thing, to be able to observe our Rule in his diocese, etc.⁴⁸

Encouraged and strengthened by the Bishop's kindness, Mother Theodore hurried to Saint Peter's and to Jasper, devoting herself in both places to give that generous counsel and timely help which made her visits so eagerly anticipated by her daughters and so highly prized.

On her return to Vincennes she had the privilege of assisting at the public sessions of the first diocesan synod held at the close of the ecclesiastical retreat, May 5, 6, and 7, 1844. The exercises were conducted by the well known Lazarist Father from Missouri, afterwards Bishop of Buffalo, the Reverend Jean Timon, C.M.⁴⁹ Twenty-five of the thirty-six priests of the diocese were present. Eight were unable to be present, among them some of the most influential missionaries in the diocese, Fathers Kundek, Du Pontavice, Saint Palais, Guéguen, Benoit, Fischer, and the Holy Cross Fathers of Notre Dame du Lac. Mother Theodore was deeply touched by the angelic appearance of the missionaries when "to the number of twenty-five, vested in their priestly robes, they received Communion from the hands of the Bishop; so heavenly was their appearance that they hardly seemed to belong any longer to this world of misery."⁵⁰ She witnessed with holy exultation the "truly grand and solemn" opening of the Synod. It began with the chant of the *Veni Creator* and the Litany of the Saints. . . . The decrees of the Council of Trent were read and a long profession of faith; then each priest, resting his hand upon the Gospel swore at the feet of the Bishop that he believed firmly all that had just been read as well as the whole doctrine of the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church."⁵¹ The Reverend Jean Timon preached, and after solemn Vespers in the afternoon there was a private session.

On Monday the same ceremonies were repeated in the Cathedral, and on Tuesday a solemn Mass of Requiem was offered for the deceased clergy of the diocese, the late heroic Bishop Bruté, and the young priests Deseille, Plunkett, Benjamin Petit, and Hamion who had already gone to their reward.

In the funeral oration it was the privilege of Father Deydier to recall "the blessed memory of the first Bishop of Vincennes." They had come to America together in 1810, and he had been for several years the companion, the friend, and confidant of Bishop Bruté during their early years in Maryland. Thus he had been more intimately associated with him than anyone present, and, too, he had been over thirty years in America, and

⁴⁸ 25 juin, 1844. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ Alerding, *History of the Vincennes Diocese*, p. 183. Mother Theodore gives Rev. Anthony Deydier, *Journals and Letters*, p. 170.

⁵⁰ *J. and L.*, p. 169.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

was the senior priest of the diocese. He had a better command of English than any of the French missionaries, better indeed than any except the two whose native language it was, Shawe and Lalumiere. So deeply touched was Mother Theodore that she reproduced Father Deydier's sermon almost in its entirety in her Third Journal of Travel, which was afterwards forwarded to her friends Veuillot and Aubineau and appeared as a *feuilleton* in Paris in the *Univers*. Some of the auditors had been recruited by the present Bishop of the diocese, but some also were members of that pioneer group who had accompanied Bishop Bruté to America in 1836. Fathers Corbe, Baquelin, Buteux, Vabret, Shawe, Parret, and Neyron were among that privileged band, the chosen children of a saint. Of them in particular were Mother Theodore's words doubly true though the traditions of Bishop Bruté's holiness were the dearest treasure of them all.

And how deeply touched were all the clergy at this recollection of their venerated father! I saw them burying their heads in their hands to hide their tears from the bystanders. There they were, those dear children of the good Bishop Bruté. There was he, that venerable prelate who had been called to replace him. . . .

The synod closed with a solemn Te Deum followed by the reading of the decrees of the last Council of Baltimore held in May, 1843, and the regulations of the Synod for the diocese of Vincennes.⁶²

These decrees are extant now only in a few fugitive copies. One of them legislated for the compilation of a diocesan catechism, a plan which probably did not materialize. Another directed the singing of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin before High Mass on Sundays, a custom found impracticable elsewhere, but still in use, after over one hundred years in the convent church at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

On May 20, after an absence of almost three weeks, Mother Theodore returned to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to resume her regular round of Community duties, her daily five o'clock instruction, and her correspondence which, later, to become very large, was already extensive. Her diary notes carefully both active and passive communications, letters by and to the Foundress. She still kept in touch with her first American friends, Madame Parmentier and Mr. Byerley, and the former through her son-in-law, Edward Bayer, made many purchases for the Community and expedited the boxes which came and went from the Le Fers in France and back again. To her Sisters on the missions Mother Theodore wrote frequently, sometimes replying to their letters almost immediately. Business matters necessitated an intermittent correspondence with the Indiana clergy, those especially who had Sisters in their schools, and she exchanged letters with Father Sorin from time to time from his coming to Indiana till her death.

To the friends who were still collecting for her, the Superior of the Paris Visitation Convent, Canon Lottin at Le Mans, Madame Le Fer de la Motte, and the Baroness de la Valette, she wrote regularly, and finally on the first of June, 1844, she was able to send to France her long narrative known in the Community annals as her "Third Journal of Travel."⁶³

⁶² *J. and L.*, pp. 172-174.

⁶³ Printed in full in *Journals and Letters*.

Carefully copied and illustrated by Sister Francis Xavier's exquisite aquarelles, when it appeared in the columns of the *Univers*, it was read with deepest interest all over France and excited considerable favorable comment. Mother Mary did not approve of its "romantic tone," but Father Perché, an editor and journalist by profession, congratulated the author on its success: "I saw your letter in the *Univers* continued like a *feuilleton*. Behold you in the ranks of the illustrious women, a fact of which, for my part, I am very proud. It is no small thing to be admitted to the intimacy of great men and women, and I hope that some rays of your glory will fall back upon me."⁶⁴

The acute poverty of the past two years was now over in the main, and it became possible to add to the furnishings of the academy in view of the increasing number of pupils. Several purchases were made about this time, a book-case, a table for the little parlor, and another for the classroom, a seraphine or small organ, for which they had to send the wagon to Terre Haute, a blackboard made at the cost of one dollar, and a bathtub for seven dollars. The pupils were now paying well, many of them in advance, and a number of old tuition accounts were settled. The ferryman at the river, thirty-five dollars, and the post box in Terre Haute, fifteen dollars, were paid for by the year. Up to the time of Mother Theodore's voyage to France the missions were too poor to contribute anything to the motherhouse, but that state of affairs now began to improve, and about this time Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer offered to Mother Theodore the sum of twenty-four dollars which remained after the expenses of the house at Vincennes were paid.

The retreat was approaching, and the Community was fortunate in having as retreat master the devoted and saintly Father Deydier. Before he arrived, however, another visitor came to say farewell, Father Anthony Parret from Washington, Indiana, who had been their Community chaplain for a year before Father Corbe's arrival. He was now on his way to Saint Louis to enter the Jesuit novitiate. The Sisters from Jasper and Saint Peter's had arrived in mid-July and were able to enjoy at the motherhouse for the first time a few weeks of needed relaxation from the fatigues of their missions. The retreat opened on August 10, all the Sisters in attendance except Sister Agnes who was in Vincennes with the boarding pupils who spent the vacation there. Father Corbe was one of the confessors, and Mother Theodore was greatly consoled by the edifying silence and recollection of the Community.

At the close of the exercise on August 19, feast of Saint Joachim,⁶⁵ still a day of special devotion in the Community, five novices were professed, Sister Augustine, Sister Mary Cecilia, Sister Mary Celestia, Sister Therese, and Sister Marie Joseph. Nine postulants received the religious habit: Sister Philomene, Sister Catherine, Sister Mary Magdalen, Sister Seraphine, Sister Ann, Sister Martha, and Sister Lucy, also the two former Sisters of Charity, Sister Angelina and Sister Mary Margaret. The Bishop was not present, but the Vicar General, Very Reverend Augustine Martin, presided at the ceremonies of profession and reception assisted by Fathers

⁶⁴ A Mother Theodore, 12 août, 1844. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁵ Transferred by Pope Leo XIII to August 16.

Deydier and Corbe. Mother Theodore had never been so deeply affected. On seeing this earnest group consecrating themselves so completely to God she felt repaid for all her sufferings and fatigues, and Sister Saint Francis tells us that "good Mr. Deydier wiped his eyes more than once." Two of the novices, Sister Philomene and Sister Lucy Doyle, were from Father Martin's former parish at Logansport, and their brothers, the two seminarians William and Philip Doyle, who spent their vacations at Saint Mary's during these years, served as acolytes. Some of the parishioners had driven eighteen miles to be present at the ceremony. One of the newly professed, Sister Augustine Graham, was also from Logansport and had been named for Father Martin. Sister Mary Celestia was another of the Bishop's protégées from the Vincennes Community of the Sisters of Charity, and Sister Therese and Sister Martha were the daughters of good old Père Michel Guthneck, who was still in charge of the farm. Sister Catherine Eisen was the first recruit to the Community from Father Kundek's German congregation at Jasper, and Sister Mary Magdalen and Sister Ann Walter have already been met in these pages. Sister Seraphine was "Laughing Eliza" Carroll, who was destined to be one of the first to die after only four years of religious life.

During the summer some momentous changes were made in the internal government of the Community. As the Bishop still insisted upon Sister Basilide's being excluded from the Particular Council, she was replaced by Sister Saint Liguori, who had to have a dispensation given by Father Corbe from the three years profession required by the Rule. Sister Marie Joseph, Sister Mary Cecilia, and Sister Augustine were also elected to the Council, which now consisted of seven members: Mother Theodore, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, Sister Saint Francis Xavier, Sister Saint Liguori, Sister Marie Joseph, Sister Mary Cecilia, and Sister Augustine. In view of Sister Basilide's imprudence, a public promise of fidelity embodying their chief duties was henceforth required of the Councilors. The placing of these young Sisters in this position of confidence in the Community was rendered necessary by circumstances, and as has been noted before, most of them had reached the years of discretion. The Community now counted thirty all told. An assembly of all the professed discussed the proposed building of wings to the academy, urgently needed on account of the increasing enrollment of pupils, and also of a defective wall in the existing structure, but the general opinion was against using the newly acquired Community funds to build on a site which was still the property of the diocese.

A few days after the close of the retreat the missionary Sisters set out for their destinations for the coming year, Logan driving them, as usual, in the new wagon as far as Vincennes where Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, Sister Mary Magdalen, Sister Philomene, and Sister Seraphine, were to be stationed for the coming year. From Vincennes Sister Augustine and Sister Agnes were to go on to Saint Peter's; Sister Marie Joseph and Sister Gabrielia to Jasper after a brief visit with the old friends and benefactors, of the Community, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Picquet and the other members of the *Colonie des Frères* at Sainte Marie, Illinois. Mother Theodore herself started two days later at two o'clock in the morning to take the stage

in Terre Haute with the three foundresses of the new mission of Madison, Sister Saint Liguori from Saint Peter's, who was to be superior, Sister Mary Celestia, who had been professed only five days earlier, and Sister Catherine, one of the newly received novices. Sister Basilide, Sister Mary Cecilia, Sister Angelina, and Sister Mary Margaret were to be employed at the academy.

CHAPTER XV

FURTHER EDUCATIONAL EXPANSION, 1843

VINCENNES, SAINT PETER'S

"Think sometimes of that beautiful day in Heaven when the true Sister of Providence will be surrounded by the children whom she has taught to love God."

MOTHER THEODORE

WHEN Bishop Bruté envisaged the necessity of procuring a religious Community to care for the education of the Catholic children of his diocese, his main thought and wish was to have a regularly formed motherhouse like Saint Joseph's at Emmitsburg, which he knew so well, or like the two edifying Communities, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Sisters of Loretto both established then for twenty-five years in the diocese of Bardstown. These Communities were effecting incalculable good in the diocese where they had originally taken root and were growing so satisfactorily as to be able to branch out and develop elsewhere. When the Bishop arrived at Vincennes however he found that the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth had been established there in Saint Clare's Female School since 1824, and though they had withdrawn in 1834, leaving him free to secure Sisters from Emmitsburg if he wished, he at once negotiated for their return.

His dominant idea to obtain for Indiana a Community of its own still persisted, however. As we have seen,¹ he essayed with the generous concurrence of the Nazareth Community a foundation of "Sisters of Charity of Vincennes" in 1838, but without success. Even after the Emmitsburg Sisters took charge and transferred from the original site of Saint Clare's Convent and Female School at Third and Vigo Streets to open Saint Mary's at Second and Church, on the "desirable corner lot," which the Bishop had purchased for them, the establishment remained subordinate to Emmitsburg. And Bishop Bruté knew before he died that to all intents and purposes it must retain the status of a mission of Emmitsburg. The superiors there would continue, however, to send Sisters to Vincennes till the Bishop could secure religious who could more fully respond to his views. In these desires as voiced at Ruillé-sur-Loir in France by his successor, the Most Reverend Celestin de la Hailandière in 1839, the Superior General of the Sisters of Providence concurred entirely by sending to Vincennes in the summer of 1840 a colony of Sisters to found in the diocese a Congregation of religious on the model of the parent organization. The fulfillment of the dead Bishop's wishes was at last an accomplished fact, and a promising beginning was made. The superior was an experienced, intelligent, and deeply spiritual religious. The group was ade-

¹ Chapter III.

quate in number to suffice in a limited environment till augmented by natural growth.

Bishop de la Hailandière had no thought, however, of locating them at Vincennes. With considerable dismay the missionary Sisters discovered that the episcopal city, the only desirable location in Indiana for the boarding school they expected to found, had been successfully served for sixteen years by a Community of experienced native Sisters familiar with the language and customs of the country. Terre Haute was the next largest town on the Wabash and had been Bishop Bruté's choice, despite the fact that only a handful of Catholics had settled there. After some hesitation Bishop de la Hailandière had decided to locate the Sisters in this vicinity, nearly seventy-five miles north of Vincennes. Impressed no doubt by the example of some of the American Communities which had been driven by adverse circumstances into remote localities, he established the new group of religious not in the growing town of Terre Haute, but five miles northwest across the swampy bottoms of the Wabash River, in a sparsely settled tract of dense woodland which he had purchased a few months earlier.

Their remote location was for many years their greatest handicap. As a result, for two years they were pensioners upon the Bishop's bounty. From what remained from the produce of their farm after the fire of October, 1842, and from the meager funds from their incipient boarding school, they were able to exist without the Bishop's help during Mother Theodore's year-long absence in France till her return in April, 1844. During this interval the Sisters of Providence had been called to the episcopal city, but under circumstances very different from their original expectations.

In view of both Bishops' well known wish for a motherhouse in Indiana, the stay of the Sisters of Charity in Vincennes had been more or less tentative almost from the first. When the small Community in the Vigo County woods, however, began to grow, they generously offered to withdraw from their academy and confine their activities to the free school at the Bishop's discretion. He made no reference, however, at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to the changes he contemplated making in Vincennes till after his July visit in 1843. As he had not yet removed Sister Saint Francis Xavier, it was with her as acting superior that his negotiations began. His letter written at this time contained a three-fold proposal already mentioned² which, as his plans were not known at Vincennes, was to be kept secret for the present: to accept the mission at Vincennes, to permit the Bishop to select the Sisters for it, and to receive two more Sisters of Charity into the Community.

Only under exceptional circumstances does the Church facilitate the transference of religious from one order to another. Bishop Bouvier's Rule of 1835 moreover expressly forbade the admission of Sisters from another religious body. Sister Saint Francis Xavier gave therefore to that part of the Bishop's request the regulation answer couched, however, in respectful terms, that if the two Sisters were good religious she

² Chapter XI.

would be very sorry to take them away from the Sisters of Charity.³ In all, Bishop de la Hailandière had now persuaded four members of the Vincennes Community to transfer to the Sisters of Providence. Sister Gabriella Doyle, whom we have met as Sister Aloysia and who was one of the four postulants awaiting the Ruillé colony on their arrival at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, was the first. Sister Francis Ann Kennedy, who as a Sister of Providence became Sister Mary Celestia or Celeste, and who had arrived on Christmas day, 1841, was now in 1844, professed and on mission at Madison. The two of whom the Bishop wrote in 1843, Sister Mary Celestia Connery, who later became Sister Angelina, and Sister Ann Austin McGrann, who became Sister Mary Margaret, entered the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods two weeks apart after the Sisters of Providence had arrived in Vincennes to take over the school.

The main details of the transfer have been summarized in the correspondence in Chapter XI. The Bishop wrote early in October to Jasper, to Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, whom he had selected as superior, and she was the first of the Sisters of Providence to reach Vincennes on October 19. The same day he had signed the deed of purchase for two thousand six hundred dollars, a large price for the day, of the two-story yellow house at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets⁴ which was to be their convent and school. Deterred now from further building operations in Vincennes by general disapproval on the part of his priests and fellow Bishops, Monseigneur de la Hailandière had decided to relinquish his plan of erecting a seminary and to establish the seminarians in the commodious quarters occupied for five years by the Sisters of Charity at Second and Church Streets, and to locate the Sisters of Providence in the newly purchased "yellow house."

Things were at more or less of a standstill at Vincennes, however, though the Bishop was busy shifting the Sisters. Some of the seminarians were yet at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, where they had spent the summer, and all the others were to arrive at Vincennes only later when their new domicile would be ready for them. Arrangements had been under way for some time to secure for their direction the Lazarists, who had been in charge of the Bardstown seminary for a year, but no final decision had yet been received from their superior, Father Jean Timon. Young Brother Anselm in charge of the boys' school had not yet arrived from Notre Dame. The free school was still closed.

Father John Corbe, who was accompanying the two postulants, Sister Mary Magdalen and Sister Philomene, vested in the religious habit privately by the Bishop's orders and designated by him for the Vincennes mission, did not leave Saint Mary-of-the-Woods till October 23. Three days later Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine reached Vincennes from the school at Saint Francisville, closed by the Bishop, owing to the fact that it was now outside the changed limits of his diocese. Both Sisters had been very ill, Sister Augustine of a painful attack of pleurisy and Sister Saint Liguori from one of the prevalent fevers. They

³ *Life of Mother Theodore*, p. 286.

⁴ Lot 194, Old Town. Sold by Robert W. Carnan to Bishop de la Hailandière, October 19, 1843. \$2,600. Knox Co. Court House Records.

had been compelled to close their school temporarily for this reason before the Bishop had discontinued it permanently. They were now convalescent and were to remain at Vincennes till Monseigneur de la Hailandière decided upon their future location. The Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of Charity were housed together at Saint Mary's Female School during the four or five weeks which elapsed before the latter could complete their preparations for departure.

A brief account of their last days in Vincennes is contained in a small volume published by the Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg in 1886 for private circulation, and made up largely of the Bruté-Seton correspondence. Sister Paulina Kennedy had succeeded Sister Benedicta as superior in August, 1841.

Difficulties arose, and in a moment of impetuosity the Sisters were placed at the disposition of their superiors. . . . Suddenly a letter came from home dispersing the Sisters. . . . They found [Father Martin] at his residence, a log house up along a zigzag fence where the roads crossed. He was a naturalist, and his room proclaimed it; there were sundry jars of reptiles preserved in alcohol and other strange looking things around. Father Martin lay on the outside of his bed consumed with fever.⁵

[He sent them to the Bishop who was] not so much surprised but more deeply moved than Father Martin. He assumed the responsibility of the recall, expressing in broken sentences his regret that his impetuosity should have brought about such a disaster. . . . To see him pacing up and down the floor, and when his back was toward us he seemed to be brushing away the tears from his face. . . . Bishop de la Hailandière was tall and majestic looking. He looked like a prince. Sister Paulina acted beautifully. She went up to him and said gently, "Oh, Bishop, on you then rests the responsibility—not on us, thank God." So . . . the Sisters of Providence came in and we came away. I cooked for them, continued the writer, four or five weeks before we could get away. We came away with our trunks and left pianos and all behind. But before the Sisters left they went to bid goodbye to Bishop Bruté, and kneeling at his tomb prayed with many tears; then they arose and sorrowfully came away.⁶

Not till near the close of November, 1843, could they finally arrange to leave Vincennes, and not till ten days later did the three Sisters of Providence remove with their pupils five blocks away to the Bishop's house on Market Street near the corner of Fifth. The house was a composite structure, a two-story brick building with a smaller frame house adjoining, erected according to the general custom of the time close to the street, with a small grass plot in front. This large corner lot⁷ owned till very recently by the diocese of Indianapolis and known for many years in Vincennes as the "Bishop's Block," is now surrounded by a busy commercial section. In the early 1840's it was considered a "retired location" and already commanded some historical interest as Zachary Taylor is said to have lived at one time at the corner. Dr. James Picquet, a younger brother of the founder of Sainte Marie, also lived there, and the famous Bonner mansion erected in 1842 with its handsome fluted pillars and spacious lawns, diagonally across the street, still standing and known as

⁵ *Bruté-Seton Correspondence*, p. 588.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 589.

⁷ 84 feet on Market Street and 280 feet on Fifth. Knox County Records.

the Bonner-Allen house, gave an added air of distinction to the corner of Fifth and Market Streets.

In the first days of December the moving began. The Sisters left Second and Church Streets on the second, three for the yellow house on Market Street and the two others, Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine, for the new mission just opened at Saint Peter's. Next day the seminarians took up their residence in the buildings vacated by the Sisters. The Bishop gave the details to Sister Basilide:

I am kept here by a thousand things, yesterday the removal of your Sisters who now live on Market Street, today that of our seminarians (22) who are lodged in the Sisters' former house, then on another day, ours. There is no end of it. Moreover, the ordination of two subdeacons is coming. . . . Sisters Liguori and Austin left yesterday.⁸

The school was smaller now than in Bishop Bruté's time and counted only twenty in the *école payante* or academy, fifty in the *école gratuite* or free school,⁹ a group more conformable in size to the new and more restricted quarters. Despite the new location and another religious Community in charge, the school retained the name Saint Mary's Female School, which had been used by the Emmitsburg Sisters.

During Bishop Bruté's lifetime he had taught in the school and Bishop de la Hailandière also, as Vicar General. Now the two young Sisters under Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer's direction took up the entire curriculum of English branches and plain and ornamental needlework. Sister Saint Vincent taught French, and Sister Mary Magdalen drawing. Sister Mary Magdalen, gentle and demure, was without practical experience. Sister Philomene, more vivacious, was a little better prepared, as she had had a few weeks teaching under Sister Basilide's direction in the village school at Saint Mary's, where she had replaced Sister Agnes. Then were forged with the group of reserved Americans and more lively French children, some of whom showed in their black eyes and straight black hair, traces of their Indian origin, the first links of a chain which today, after over a hundred years, binds the Sisters of Providence to the people of Vincennes.

Mother Theodore, however, was not well pleased with the progress of the pupils when she visited the classes in May after her return from France. Sister Saint Vincent's health was poor, as it had been during the year and a half she spent at Jasper, and though the Bishop had sent Sister Stanislaus from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in the previous January to assist in teaching, all three young Sisters had missed the series of intensive lessons in practical pedagogy by which Mother Theodore ordinarily prepared the young teachers before sending them out. She now endeavored to supply as much as possible for this omission by gathering them after school hours for pleasant and inspirational talks as well as practical instruction in ways of arousing and maintaining the interest of their pupils. Going into their classes she taught in their presence, illustrating devices and solving difficulties. Her gracious personality and the loving words with which she explained the truths of our holy Faith completely won the children's hearts.

⁸ 3 décembre, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁹ Book of the Foundations. S.M.W.A.

We remained several days at Vincennes, she wrote to Bishop Bouvier, to instruct these postulants (they had been vested by order of the Bishop) in the art of teaching. . . . We gave them a method with helpful advice as to exciting emulation in those little hearts at present so uninterested.

Sister Saint Vincent and I agreed that for this year at least boarding pupils would not be received, as it would not be advisable to entrust them to the two postulants. . . . They were not yet prepared for rearing children. Before leaving for Saint Peter's I had told the Bishop I would take with me to Saint Mary's the one boarder the Sisters had, and he did not make the least objection.¹⁰

The little school now gradually grew and prospered. By abandoning the idea of keeping boarders in their limited quarters, the Sisters were better able to devote themselves to their teaching duties. Resident pupils were a great care to the Sisters all during the early years. Although never numerous, they required the constant surveillance of the French system, thus doubling the Sisters' duties. They came ordinarily from Catholic families living at a distance from the church, whose children could not obtain otherwise the instruction in their religion which the parents had in view. Accordingly, boarding pupils were found sporadically in almost all the schools of the Sisters of Providence until comparatively recent years.

Eventually a night school for adults was added to the Sisters' activities in Vincennes, and by 1847 they had included music, painting, oriental painting, and the making of artificial flowers among the subjects offered. The French language continued to be taught as an extra or optional subject at three dollars per quarter. Pupils were charged one dollar for pens, ink, and the use of reading books, which were at that time never sold but carefully covered and used from year to year. In conformity with a general custom, pupils paid a dollar and a half for the wood used as fuel, or supplied an equivalent amount. The above terms referred to the academy only; in the free school the curriculum was the same except for the French, the fine arts, and fancy work.

The Sisters of Providence remained four years and a half at Saint Mary's Female School in the Bishop's yellow house at Fifth and Market Streets, that is, till the end of Bishop de la Hailandière's episcopate and with almost the same group of Sisters. They retained the name Saint Mary's long after they returned to Second and Church Streets, and the name Saint Rose began to be used only in 1865.¹¹ In August, 1844, Mother Theodore returned the original four Sisters in deference to the Bishop's wishes, adding Sister Seraphine Carroll, who was among the nine novices who had that same month received the religious habit. Sister Gabriella Moore's is the only additional name which appears on the Vincennes records for these years, and the number of Sisters never exceeded four.

Parts of the yellow house were out of repair, and though the Sisters of Charity had left all their furnishings, very little found its way to Market Street. The Sisters slept with scanty covering on the floor for many weeks of that first winter. The kitchen, where little Sister Seraphine spent her time between her school duties at the cooking, resembled nothing so much

¹⁰ 25 juin, 1844. S.M.W.A.

¹¹ *Sadlier's Catholic Almanac and Ordo for the Year of Our Lord 1865* (F. and J. Sadlier & Co., New York), p. 156.

as a dark and damp dungeon where three or four broken windows hardly admitted sufficient light to see the different utensils which hung from the falling walls. Rain fell through the roof to such an extent that the plank floor was often covered with water. There was no chapel in the house, and the Sisters assembled in their Community room for their devotions of Rule. They went to the Cathedral for daily Mass, where their places were on the Gospel side in the front pew. Mother Theodore on her different visits always knelt there next the middle aisle. The front places near the wall on the Epistle side were for years occupied by the Saint Gabriel's College boys, and Dr. and Mrs. John Isidore Baty eventually had a pew a little farther back on the same side. The seminarians occupied places in the sanctuary.

One of Mother Theodore's first cares during her May visitation of 1844 was to remedy the Sisters' destitution and add something to the meager diet on which they were subsisting when she stopped with them on her way back from France. The hardships and poor food on the missions soon bore bitter fruit among the young Sisters in the early deaths from tuberculosis which haunted the American religious Communities for years. Not all the French Sisters had the hardy constitutions proof against exposure and fatigue which distinguished the missionary priests, nor were all the daughters of the American frontier cast in heroic mould. Sister Saint Liguori was the first serious loss, and Sister Seraphine followed her almost immediately. She left Vincennes after two years and in October, 1846, as Mother Theodore records.¹² "came home very ill with an affection of the lungs." She had insisted on helping with the washing on Saturday to the last despite the pain in her side. She had suffered, too, from the thoughtlessness of her pupils who took advantage of her youth and inexperience. On her deathbed she looked back to her damp kitchen, regretting that she had not garnered more carefully the heavenly riches of resignation in all she had endured there. She lived till February 22, 1847, dying full of faith and love after making her perpetual vows, and only a few minutes after receiving Holy Communion as viaticum.¹³

Vincennes during these years, under Bishop de la Hailandière's feverish impetus, took on an aspect which differed considerably from the frontier town Mother Theodore saw for the first time in October, 1840. The population, however, remained almost stationary. The adjoining country was inundated twice in the year till the levees were built in the 1850's. Animals still roamed the streets, and the lowing of cows marked their return, morning and evening, from the woods where they lived and foraged. The snake fences and log cabins of upright timbers known as *poteaux en terre* persisted, too, for many years. In 1840 the great walnut wood contiguous to the Harrison mansion, where Tecumseh and his seventy warriors had met the Governor in 1810, was cut away. The house still long remained the finest in the town even after Judge Ellis in 1830 had erected his handsome classic residence with pillared portico on Second Street, and David Bonner built his colonial mansion on Fifth and Market. The line of demarcation between Americans and French Canadians who

¹² Necrology by Mother Theodore. S.M.W.A.

¹³ Chapter XX.

till 1855 made up a large part of the population,¹⁴ was still evident, and elaborate funerals were still held with single and double bell toll and services of "the curé, the vicaire, the bedeau and the chœur"¹⁵ in the old French cemetery between the Cathedral and the river. Red and black slaves were disguised as indentured servants. The first of Bishop de la Hailandière's building periods had closed in 1840, after he had erected with funds from Europe the library and half of the present rectory and excavated the crypt chapel for Bishop Bruté's remains. He had also at that time finished the Cathedral and its spire, installing the second bell "large and sweet-toned," and the tower clock.

In the 1840's Vincennes had however developed into an educational center whose limits extended beyond the diocese and even the state. Into this educational system the "Female Academy," and the free and night schools of the Sisters of Providence dovetailed in their own sphere. Saint Gabriel's College, founded as the Catholic College of Vincennes by Bishop Bruté in 1837,¹⁶ had been established since 1839 in the old college building with its spacious grounds, erected thirty years earlier. It had grown satisfactorily under Father Jean Pierre Bellier's dynamic presidency and counted boys from Peru and Fort Wayne, many of Indian blood; from Chicago, the North Arm, and Sainte Marie in Illinois; from Saint Louis, and as far south as New Orleans. "Nous vous beatons"¹⁷ wrote Father Bellier jocosely to Mother Theodore in 1842, when he had twenty-six resident pupils. He had made a hurried trip to France in 1841, and when Sister Saint Francis Xavier traveled with him on his return journey to Vincennes in September of that year, the three "tall young men" who accompanied him were recruits for the work of Saint Gabriel's. The Bishop protected the college in 1842 by locating Father Sorin and his Brothers far to the north on the large tract of land on the Saint Joseph River deeded to Bishop Bruté by Father Badin and named at once by its new owners Notre Dame du Lac. Father Dominic Bach, who had come to Indiana in 1840 with Bishop Forbin-Janson, seeking a site for his order, the Mercedarian Fathers, had decided earlier against opening a college either there or at New Albany, and the Picquet family had not been successful in inducing either Redemptorists or Jesuits to establish themselves at Sainte Marie. With the Kentucky Jesuits Bishop de la Hailandière was not more fortunate. Sparsely-settled Indiana had now as many institutions as it could maintain or people.

Saint Gabriel's, however, had adequate housing in the roomy old college, and the 1844 prospectus details a five-year English or mercantile course and a six-year classical course, both beginning, as was usual on the frontier, with reading, writing, and arithmetic. The French priests quickly discovered that it was not possible to expect the attainments of the classical colleges of France on the western missions, and they ordinarily had boys of grammar, high school, and college grade in the colleges. The custom in the West was to receive all the boys who applied and confer degrees after three years, as most boys could not be persuaded

¹⁴ Cauthorn, *St. Francis Xavier Cathedral*, p. 12.

¹⁵ MS. List in Notre Dame Archives.

¹⁶ *Catholic Almanac and Laity's Directory*, 1838, p. 102.

¹⁷ "We are beating you." 4 mai, 1842. S.M.W.A.

to remain longer.¹⁸ The curriculum therefore depended largely on circumstances. Father Chassé was vice-president in 1844, and Fathers Vabret and Buteux professors. A young lawyer from Pennsylvania, one of Bishop de la Hailandière's recent converts, Benjamin M. Thomas, was secretary to the board of trustees, and Dr. Baty, before his marriage, lived at the college as professor and resident physician.

The diocesan seminary at the time of the removal to the former Sisters' school numbered twenty-two students. The two institutions, which were later fused for a short time into one, functioned side by side all during Bishop de la Hailandière's episcopate. The church students had occupied the building in the rear of the rectory and slept in the attic. On Sundays and feast days they assisted with the services in the sanctuary of the Cathedral. Like Saint Gabriel's College, the seminary accepted students of grammar grade, housing under the same roof theologians and boys learning the rudiments of Latin. Father Bacquelin, writing to Father Martin describes the attainments of a lad whom he was recommending as a student: "He reads at present very well in the third reader." As a measure of economy the older seminarians acted as preceptors to the younger boys. The two Doyles, Sister Philomene's and Sister Lucy's brothers, were here all during Father Martin's incumbency of five years, also Thomas Monaghan, whose mother lived in a log house on the place at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and whose two daughters, Hannah and Juliette, as Sister Josephine and Sister Clementine respectively, lived short but beautiful and devout lives in the Community.

Mrs. Monaghan, left a widow in destitute circumstances had come with her group of young children to the convent for assistance during Mother Theodore's absence in France. She was taken in and the workmen directed to cut down trees and build her house on the Community grounds. One of the Sisters who was a skilled seamstress, probably Sister Olympiade, taught her dressmaking, and she gradually became able to support herself. Thomas Monaghan was eventually induced by a half-sister to leave the seminary and go to New Orleans, where like so many others, he died almost immediately.

Saint Pierre or Saint Peter's in Daviess County was the second mission opened by Bishop de la Hailandière during Mother Theodore's absence in France. Seven miles southeast of Washington, twenty-seven from Vincennes, and one mile from the present site of the town of Montgomery, the locality was also known, even after the church was built, as Black Oak Ridge or White River from the natural features. Included in the old Vincennes Grant and therefore open to settlement many years before Harrison began his treaties with the Indians, and easy of access from the Ohio River by the Red Banks and Yellow Banks Trails or by the Buffalo Trace, the district early filled with Catholic Kentuckians. The name of the county perpetuates the memory of one of their compatriots, the gallant Jo Daviess, Colonel of Long Knives, who perished at Tippecanoe.

These Indiana pioneers bore the names and carried on the traditions of the sixty families of the Maryland league of 1785, the first Catholics to

¹⁸ Augustus J. Thébaud, S.J., *Forty Years in the United States of America* (U. S. Catholic Historical Society, New York, 1904), p. 331.

cross the mountains to Kentucky after the Revolution, and their close followers who came in considerable numbers for years afterwards, Coomes, Mudd, Thompson, Spalding, Mattingly, Hagan, Alvey, Jarboe, Montgomery, Cambron, Hamilton, Elder, and others. Of these the veteran historian of early Catholicity in Kentucky, Benedict J. Webb, wrote in 1884 that "in Indiana and Missouri very many resident Catholics of the present day are able to trace their ancestry to those who first of all in the wilds of Kentucky told their beads in the shadow of Rohan's Knob," old Holy Cross Church on Pottinger's Creek, in Nelson County, the first Catholic settlement in Kentucky.¹⁹ Webb describes their character in words applicable to most of the Kentucky Catholics: "The Holy Cross people loved dancing and cards now and then, but also daily night and morning prayers in common." This devotion to their Faith they carried with them into their new homes and Saint Peter's, built in 1820 by the Reverend Anthony Blanc, later Archbishop of New Orleans, was the first of a group of five primitive churches which gradually sprang up in this region in response to their needs. From related families in this locality came eventually the largest group of religious and students to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, some forty-two in all.²⁰

As the most populous Catholic region outside Vincennes, Saint Peter's seemed the neutral center for a colony of religious. Bishop de la Hailandière had considered it for the Sisters of Providence before locating them in Vigo County as has been noted, and before Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine reached Saint Peter's from Vincennes in midwinter of 1843 to open their little school, two other religious groups had preceded them, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Brothers of the Holy Cross. The final detachment of Father Sorin's Brothers had left Saint Peter's en route for Notre Dame du Lac only during the previous February after a residence of a year and a half.

Eleven years earlier, in 1832, before Bishop Bruté was named Bishop of Vincennes, and eight years after they had opened Saint Clare's mission there, a second colony of four Nazareth Sisters of Charity came to Indiana and spent a year in the endeavor to establish a school at Saint Peter's. Father Simon Lalumiere, the pastor, had made his theological studies at Bardstown and was known to the Nazareth Sisters, and after his ordination in 1830 had been sent by Bishop Flaget to Daviess County, the first, and when Bishop Bruté arrived in 1834, the only native Indiana priest in the diocese. A quarter section of land had been given by two devout Catholics, William Dant and his mother, for ecclesiastical purposes, and at the time of the dedication of Father Lalumiere's frame church in 1831, the number of Catholic settlers in the vicinity was estimated as over one hundred.

The four Sisters of Charity from Nazareth arrived at Saint Peter's in the spring of 1832 and opened their school in a house prepared for them near the church. Mother Angela Spink, the superior, was an experienced and capable Sister who had founded Saint Vincent's Academy in the wilds of western Kentucky in 1820, establishing a boarding school amid in-

¹⁹ *Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*, p. 41.

²⁰ The Brett-Burke-Larkin-Carlos-Walker-Patterson family group.

credible privations. She had just resigned as superior general of the Nazareth Community, a post to which she had been elected in 1831. Among the teachers was a Sister of unusual attainments and natural gifts, Sister Ellen O'Connell, then in her sixtieth year, who had long been known throughout the South as one of the most successful and highly valued teachers at Nazareth Academy. Mother Angela's brother, Francis X. Spink, had settled in the vicinity of Black Oak Ridge in 1822, and Mass was said in his house. No doubt everything was done to facilitate the work of the Sisters, though they remained only a year.

Saint Peter's however continued to attract notice as a possible location for a religious order. Bishop Bruté on his arrival in Indiana was favorably impressed and considered the place suitable for the colony of Sisters of Charity from Emmitsburg, which he hoped to secure. Saint Peter's was the first church he visited after his consecration in November, 1834.

This is the place of Mr. Lalumière where for a while, as at Vincennes, the Sisters of Nazareth kept a school. Being in the interior of the country, five miles from Washington, the school, like that of Vide Poche²¹ could not be numerous; it was more so, however, having twenty-five day scholars and six boarders. The house . . . a plain log house, too. The church is near, across a small yard in grass—a neat frame building of forty feet by twenty-eight. A farm is attached . . . woodland, corn, cattle, etc. My fancy with the good Catholics or friendly Protestants around at one, two miles, etc., this would be my holy hermitage for life.²²

Bishop de la Hailandière seems to have had no hesitation in assigning the Brothers of Saint Joseph to "the old Dant grant," as it was called. On arriving in Vincennes, October 10, 1841, Father Sorin and his six companions went almost at once to Saint Peter's. As three of the Brothers were artisans and one, Brother Lawrence, an experienced agriculturist, they began to cultivate the farm, and though they lacked almost everything but food and clothes, and slept on planks for two months, they were, in the words of their Founder, "habitually light-hearted and content with their lot."²³

The next year, as their wish to establish a college conflicted with the Bishop's plans, he offered them Father Badin's former location on the Saint Joseph River near South Bend on condition that they would take charge of the mission and would build a college within two years.²⁴ In November, 1842, when Father Sorin left for Notre Dame with part of his Community, the remaining Brothers continued at Saint Peter's having as their superior Father William Stephen Chartier who had accompanied the Sisters of Providence to Vincennes in October, 1840. He had spent the intervening time as pastor at Madison where he succeeded the founder of the parish, the learned and eloquent Englishman, Father Michael Edgar Evelyn Gordon Shawe. With Bishop de la Hailandière's permission Father Chartier had joined Father Sorin's group during the first year and was placed in charge of the Brothers who were to spend the winter at Saint Peter's and transport the effects of the Community to their new home in the early spring. Brother Vincent and the remaining mem-

²¹ Carondelet, Missouri.

²² *Bruté-Seton Correspondence*, p. 421.

²³ Trahey, *The Brothers of Holy Cross*, p. 51.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

bers of the Community left in the following February before the thaws turned the roads to rivers of mud.

The Bishop made all the arrangements for opening the new mission but did not attempt to make any provision for the Sisters. He thought that they could cultivate the farm for their support as he was aware that the pioneers of the locality, many of whom were recent arrivals, were totally unable to provide for the Sisters. Father Ducoudray had been transferred from Saint Francisville to Saint Peter's in October, and one Sunday in late November the Bishop visited the church and announced the Sisters' coming. Only later did he communicate with Sister Basilide at Saint Mary's. Both the Bishop and Father Sorin had spoken to Mother Theodore of the advisability of removing the motherhouse of the Sisters of Providence from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to Saint Peter's after the Brothers left. "But, oh, no thought of changing," wrote His Lordship.²⁵ The five weeks at Vincennes had somewhat restored the two prospective foundresses of the mission of Saint Peter's, who had been ill so long at Saint Francisville. The Bishop handed them nineteen dollars to be spent for a cow and sent his nephew, Mr. Gaulin Mancel, a seminarian still in minor orders, to accompany them and install them in their new surroundings.

When the two Sisters arrived at their destination on December 3, 1843, they saw that their undertaking would demand all their zeal and courage, but they went bravely to work to make the best of their meager resources. The church property at Saint Peter's consisted of the small frame church built twelve years earlier by Father Lalumiere, the log addition occupied by the pastor, Father Ducoudray, and a short distance away the two cabins for the Sisters' use as school and convent. The Bishop had purchased whatever of value had remained of the improvements the Brothers had made. The two log houses they had occupied, which were the ones to be used by the Sisters, had been untenanted for many months. Even the hinges were gone from the doors and windows. The cabin which was to serve for the school was in fairly good repair and contained as furnishings a few primitive desks and decrepit benches. The other in which the Sisters were to live, fully merited Mother Theodore's description, "an old shed." Like the schoolhouse, it was divided into two rooms of which only one was habitable. They were hardly installed at their new mission when Bishop de la Hailandière arrived. He never felt it incumbent upon him to officiate in the cathedral on great feasts. Christmas of 1840 he had spent at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and in 1843 on the great day he was at Saint Peter's.

The Sisters opened school the day after New Year's. Sister Saint Liguori gave details to Sister Saint Francis Xavier:

I am perfectly content—Sister Augustine and I have already become accustomed to live on alms. Our excellent people of Saint Peter's are very poor, but they hasten with a good heart to share with us the little they have. One brings a small piece of butter, another a few pounds of feathers for our beds, a candle, a dozen apples, a small quantity of coffee, or a broom. Yesterday they brought us a half dozen plates with two pretty little spoons, two coffee cups, and a box of matches.

²⁵ A Mother Theodore, 16 novembre, 1842. S.M.W.A.

You see that they think of everything. We also received a little salt. Each one gives so gladly that we are deeply touched. We receive, I shall not say the bread of charity, for they have only corn. Our house is a "log house" composed of two rooms, one of which we shall occupy when it is repaired. The other is our kitchen. The church is a hundred steps away. Pray that we may draw great profit from all the opportunities which God gives us here to practice virtue.²⁰

To Mother Theodore, Sister Saint Liguori wrote in April, 1844:

The few chairs we have in our house are all borrowed; the bed in which I am sleeping and the coverings I use belong to three different families. Our dormitory is very similar to the first one we had at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. A log house divided into two rooms serves as a school and keeps out the snow and the rain fairly well, but the two-room log house which serves as our kitchen and refectory is in urgent need of repair. This winter, as we had so little wood, we stayed in the kitchen after school hours. If the winter had been a severe one, I think we would have frozen as the wind, the rain, and snow come in from above and below and on the sides. Our refectory has large openings between the logs, and on that account we have not eaten there for three weeks. Last Saturday night our table was covered with snow. If we only had a ladder, we could stuff the holes ourselves.

The poor establishment of Saint Peter's has had a melancholy beginning. At Francisville I had left off my solemn look, but it has come back redoubled. We are in truth very poor, but we have bread. . . . On our leaving Vincennes the Bishop gave us a clock, a few school books, and nineteen dollars. With this sum, small considering our needs, we have added a very little to our furnishings. The congregation has raised a subscription of thirty some dollars to assist us, most of it paid in corn, wheat, flour, soap, etc., which have been of great utility to us.

The parishioners have also furnished us with corn and provender for two cows and their calves and a third yearling calf which we purchased, all for sixteen dollars. We have milk in abundance. This enables us to economize on coffee, tea, and even meat, for a bowl of milk and a piece of bread make a delicious meal.

We are obliged to accept chickens and geese in exchange for tuition. The latter are very useful in furnishing us with feathers for our beds, and the hens kept us in eggs all during Lent. We now have a feather bed of our own, two well filled *couvre-pieds*,²¹ cotton for nine to twelve pairs of sheets, three pillow cases, half a dozen plates, knives, forks, and spoons, and something to bake our bread in; also a hundred and fifty pounds of flour and five hundred pounds of pork plus about ten pounds of coffee. Behold our entire fortune. We receive hardly any school money, only provisions.²²

Though the number of pupils was small, the Sisters' duties were heavy from the start. Twenty children at most made up the school, sixteen the greater part of the time. Poor as they were, the Sisters were practically obliged by the Bishop to accept two of several boarders who presented themselves as he knew that the people of Saint Peter's could never support the school. The two Sisters were thus so overwhelmed with work that a normal religious life was impossible:

We can hardly perform our spiritual exercises in common any more except at six in the evening. We wake the children at half past five, and one of us makes her

²⁰ Saint Peter's, Ind., n. d., published in *Sainte Marie-des-Bois* (Imprimé par *L'Univers*, Paris, 1846), pp. 190-193.

²¹ Foot coverlets.

²² A Mother Theodore, 1 avril, 1844. S.M.W.A.

meditation in the dormitory. At six we have the happiness of assisting at Holy Mass every day that Mr. Ducoudray is at home. Six-thirty is the time for our Office on days when we do not receive Holy Communion, and one of us remains with the two children—they are really almost grown girls—who study till seven. The other Sister cares for the animals and sees that breakfast is ready at seven.²⁹

In its general features this little frontier school conformed in curriculum to the current American model. The Sisters taught their pupils reading, writing, arithmetic, and sewing. Geography and French were extra. The first group of subjects was the ordinary course of study of American elementary schools of the time, to which was sometimes added geography. Sewing and French were special offerings of the Sisters. The terms were accommodated to the poverty of the families: two dollars per quarter; for geography a half dollar extra. "These are the terms current in this vicinity," wrote Sister Liguori.³⁰ Only at Vincennes was there a free "poor school." Here the school was a recognized district school, and Mother Theodore signed a contract with the trustees about a year after the Sisters assumed charge of the school, the first of the regular agreements by which she sought from now on to stabilize the conditions under which the Sisters on the missions must live and work.

Nowadays the relations between school and convent and pastor are more or less fixed by diocesan and other customs, but a hundred years ago circumstances were very different, and no set procedure was customary. The Sisters' duties quickly absorbed all their time, with the long hours in the school room and their spiritual exercises of Rule to perform afterwards. In addition they had household duties of their own and the care of the altar and the cleaning and laundry for the church. At Saint Francisville they had added over and above, cooking, laundry, and mending for Father Ducoudray. Now, however, the Bishop ordered a change. They were to be entirely independent of the pastor in house and school, and were to prepare his meals only if paid for doing so. Small matters like this added beyond measure to the unrest in the diocese. At this time Father Ducoudray was taking active measures to affiliate himself with another diocese in the South, and some eight other priests were sharers in the negotiations. Mother Theodore herself was eventually forced to try to exempt the Sisters from cooking for the missionaries. The bigotry rampant in the country was one reason; another was the necessity of conserving the life and health of the Sisters.

These two young Sisters, now experienced and capable of many years of fruitful labor for the mission of Indiana, were both practically already broken in health by the hardships of their one year at Saint Francisville. Sister Augustine, or Austin, as she was often called, a reserved and attractive person, had a severe attack of pleurisy, which recurred for a long time at intervals.

In September I was very uneasy about her, wrote Sister Saint Liguori. She had pleurisy complicated by bilious fever, and for a long time I thought her lungs were affected. Our good Negress did all the work she could, and I the rest. I never left Sister alone. Mr. Ducoudray was very kind and sent for the French doctor as often as it seemed necessary. I could not tell you all the remedies she took, but

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

she recovered very slowly, and her health has never since been good. As long as she has only light work she can keep up, but she suffers almost continually. . . .

In October I was taken ill of bilious fever, and from August on I had the ague. By taking a great deal of quinine since that time I broke the fever for a week or two, but even a breath of wind brought it back. I am dressed now as warmly as if we were in the depths of winter. If the weather is wet, I cannot go out at all. Week before last I had to resume the quinine as I got my feet wet while seeing to the hauling of our wood. Thus I lost about one-third of my Lenten fast, and neither of us has been able to resume it. . . . You make our mouths water by speaking of going to Saint Mary's. It is annoying to have a conscience which compels us to say that with precautions which are very tiresome we are better.³¹

Mother Theodore, when she visited them in May, was grieved even to tears at their situation and seriously alarmed at their condition of health:

On arriving at Saint Peter's, she wrote to Bishop Bouvier, we found both of the Sisters sick. They were prostrate from fatigue and want. Poor children! How could they have passed the winter in such extreme poverty! Their log house is open to every wind, and inside there is nothing, nothing! . . . not a key to lock out not only the thieves (which are not rare in this country) but even the wild animals that would enter their cabin. Every night we were obliged to draw up a school desk against the door to keep it closed.³²

Despite sickness and privations, however, the two Sisters were happy in their hermitage and had but one heart and soul in their work. Sister Saint Liguori related their "adventures" as she called them, with charming gaiety, and Mother Theodore tells how heartily they all laughed when in the evening before retiring to what they called their dormitory, they dragged the furniture up against the ramshackle door which had neither latch nor lock.³³

The Foundress was now convinced that something definite would have to be decided upon as conditions prerequisite for undertaking the missions. As there is no mention of any antecedent discussion of this subject in the Community records, it had probably been one of the items proposed at the conference with Bishop Bouvier the previous summer at Ruillé. She had already mentioned the matter during her stay in Vincennes to Monseigneur de la Hailandière:

That very day, while I was at the Bishop's house a priest came to ask for Sisters for his parish. Monseigneur answered: "There is the Mother, arrange the matter with her. I approve in advance whatever you agree upon." We refused to do anything without His Lordship, but I explained frankly the conditions I exacted on my part before consenting to give Sisters: That the Sisters would receive the income from their schools without having to render an account of it to anyone but to their superior or to the person delegated by her to visit the establishment; that some provision must be made for the free school, and that a house, furnished, be provided for the use of the Sisters, etc., etc.

I supported my conditions with solid reasons equally advantageous to the priests and the Religious. I was listened to and approved by the Bishop and also by the Missionary who desired no better terms. As I was to leave the next morning to visit the new establishments, I asked Monseigneur what was to be done, nothing

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Mother Theodore à Mgr. Bouvier, 25 juin, 1844.

³³ *J. and L.*, p. 176.

having been regulated for these houses. He replied: "Do as you wish; do whatever seems best. I approve in advance all that you will do."³⁴

At Saint Peter's Mother Theodore spoke to the pastor, Father Ducoudray, of the new regulations. "He made no objections. He said they would not concern him very long, as he was going to leave the diocese. He is the nephew of His Lordship."³⁵

Though the Sisters were happy amid their privations and were accomplishing much good, their situation was precarious. The poverty of the people made it an evident impossibility for them to support the school. Rather than to allow the Sisters to perish from want and fatigue, Mother Theodore offered, with the authority Monseigneur had given her, to take them with her back to Saint Mary's, but they begged to remain. They were devoted to their pupils and their work, and she found their classes satisfactorily taught and the Sisters themselves full of zeal and good will. The motley group of pupils, ranging in age from seven to twenty and over, were docile and well disposed. Giving them a holiday, she took the two Sisters with her for a change of air and a little diversion to Jasper. That her fears for their lives were not groundless was proved a year or so later when Dr. Baty at Vincennes pointed to the hardships and exposure of the winters at Saint Francisville and Saint Peter's as the source of the deeply rooted tuberculosis, which carried off Sister Saint Liguori, the most promising of the early mission Sisters, the first to die after only six years in America.

The mission of Saint Peter's was destined not to last long. In the following August Mother Theodore withdrew Sister Saint Liguori, whom she appointed superior of the important and difficult mission at Madison which opened at that time. In her place Sister Augustine became superior at Saint Peter's with Sister Agnes as her companion. The next year, 1845, Sister Agnes was named superior accompanied by Sister Mary Margaret, but when, on opening the school they had only seven pupils, Mother Theodore recalled Sister Agnes to Saint Mary's and transferred Sister Mary Margaret to Jasper. Thus the mission of Saint Peter's came to an end.

Despite his dissatisfaction Father Ducoudray did not leave the diocese till nearly a year after Bishop de la Hailandière himself had withdrawn.³⁶ The South quickly proved fatal to this vigorous young priest. He died on December 30, 1849, in New Orleans after an illness of only three days during a cholera epidemic which was raging there. The old church of Saint Peter's, served from 1847 to 1895 by Father Bartholomew Piers³⁷ was later rebuilt at Montgomery. Today the omnipresent weeds of neglected rural areas grow unrebuked over the site where two young Sisters of Providence made their brave efforts to plant and spread the Faith in Daviess County over a hundred years ago.

³⁴ Mother Theodore à Mgr. Bouvier, 25 juin, 1844.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Community Diary, November 10, 1848.

³⁷ Uncle of Sister Joseph Aloysius Byrne.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FOUNDATION OF MADISON — 1844-1848

"Madison, where we have suffered so much."

MOTHER THEODORE

MADISON, the thriving river town on the Ohio, teeming with commerce and forging rapidly into first place in the steamboat traffic, was the first field of zeal opened to the daughters of Providence after Mother Theodore's return from France. On the occasion of her visit to Vincennes in May, 1844, during the ecclesiastical retreat and synod already described, she was approached with a request for Sisters by the Reverend Julian Delaune, a gifted young priest from her native diocese of Saint Briec in Brittany, who in 1842 had been appointed pastor of Saint Michael's Church, at Madison.

The mission opened under favorable auspices. Father Delaune had acceded at once to Mother Theodore's new regulations, the details of which were later fixed by correspondence. He could offer two hundred dollars a year and a dwelling for the Sisters. Eventually he assumed the house rent and offered the furniture as a personal contribution. A music teacher was the first desideratum: "Some people think that otherwise it will be impossible to attract the upper class of our society to your academy," wrote Father Delaune.¹ The Bishop had given his approbation and when the particular council at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods discussed the matter during the retreat in August, the establishment was definitely accepted. Owing to the increase in numbers in the Community there was now no longer question of sending the Sisters out before their training in the religious life had been completed. Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote to friends in France that thirty Sisters and novices had joined in chanting the *Te Deum* at the close of the retreat.² This was creditable growth for less than four years.

The nine novices received on the feast of the Assumption were according to the Rule of 1835 eligible to spend the remainder of their novitiate engaged in the active works of the Congregation. Not all, however, were teachers. In accordance with the custom prevalent in Europe, Sister Ann Walter continued as Sister Olympiade's assistant in the care of the domestic animals; Sister Lucy Doyle, Sister Philomene's sister, was in training under Mother Theodore as pharmacist and infirmarian, and Père Michel's two elder daughters, Sister Therese and Sister Martha Guthneck, were already excellent cooks. All these Sisters were retained at the

¹ A Mother Theodore, 22 mai, 1844. S.M.W.A.

² Mother Theodore, Sister Saint Francis Xavier, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, Sister Basilide, Sister Olympiade, Sister Mary Xavier, Sister Saint Liguori, Sister Marie Joseph, Sister Agnes, Sister Philomene, Sister Augustine, Sister Gabriella, Sister Mary Cecilia, Sister Mary Celestia, Sister Mary Magdalen, Sister Catherine, Sister Therese, Sister Martha, Sister Seraphine, Sister Lucy, Sister Ann, Sister Michel, Sister Mary Margaret, Sister Angelina, Sister Anastasie, Sister Caroline, Sister Joachim, Sister Monique, Sister Mary Therese, Sister Lawrence.

motherhouse for many years. The two novices from Vincennes, Sister Mary Magdalen and Sister Philomene, now canonically vested, returned there with Sister Seraphine, who was eventually professed two years later on her deathbed.

Mother Theodore neglected nothing which could contribute to the success of the new mission. For Madison she chose for superior Sister Saint Liguori and for her companions Sister Mary Celestia, now professed, who had been engaged for two years at the academy, and Sister Catherine Eisen, Father Kundek's first novice from Jasper. Though normally a music teacher, Sister Celeste, as she was generally called, would also assist Sister Liguori in her classes in the *école payante*, to be called Saint Anne's Academy. Sister Catherine was to preside over the free school. Each Sister's duties were carefully outlined before they left Saint Mary's. Unlike the location of the two previous ventures at Saint Francisville and Saint Peter's, Madison was a growing metropolis and promised a sufficient number of children to insure a permanent foundation. To be able later to assist them more fully and intelligently, Mother Theodore accompanied the three Sisters to install them in their new surroundings. There she could see for herself their accommodations, the character and temper of pupils and parents, the prospects for development, and the immediate and future needs of the establishment. Madison had had pretentious educational experiments and some time earlier the Lancastrian method had been popular. Father Delaune had already announced the opening of the Sisters' school:

YOUNG LADIES' ACADEMY

under the direction of the Sisters of Providence

Corner of Broadway and 3d Streets, Madison, Indiana

The Sisters of Providence have rented a spacious building in the City of Madison where they intend to open a female academy on the 1st Monday of September.³

The curriculum included: "English Orthography, Reading and Writing, Grammar, Composition, Ancient and Modern History, Geography, Practical and Rational Arithmetic, Natural Philosophy, Rhetoric, also plain and ornamental needlework, tapestry, embroidery, and drawing. Pupils will also be taught French, Vocal Music, and Music on the Piano. Pupils of every religious denomination are admitted into the institution, but no conversation on the subject of religion will be allowed at any time."

This was a definite bid for Protestant patronage, and the curriculum approached the course offered at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Boarding pupils would be received, but the main reliance of the academy was upon "day scholars," for whom the quarterly terms ranged from four dollars for the first or lowest class, to seven for the fourth or highest, in which high school subjects including natural philosophy and rhetoric were taught. Supplementary charges were made for "drawing and painting, piano music, French, stationery, and fuel for the season." Some of the Irish priests educated in Europe were surprised to see Sister Liguori teaching the advanced subjects required by the curriculum, but she pointed out that, taught by women, they were part of the American system, to which the Sisters had conformed. The status of women, as we have noted, was

³ *Madison Courier*, August 24, 1844.

totally different from their position in the Old World, even in France with its long line of heroic women. The pioneer women of America had proved their mettle in long days and nights of danger on the frontier. Nothing was therefore too good for them and the incapacity of women was not a subject of moment to parents. Therefore, the school at Madison began at once to prosper.

Mother Theodore's voyages gave her opportunity to consult some of the erudite and experienced missionaries upon ways and means of improving the course at the now rapidly expanding academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Father Delaune, a finely educated and intelligent priest, had definite ideas on education. He had interested himself from the very beginning in Father Sorin's plans, and the boys' school at Madison, taught by Brothers from Notre Dame, had been in operation in the church basement for a year. The school suffered a great loss when Brother Anselm, a capable and promising young religious, was accidentally drowned in the river in July, 1845. Only two years after the Sisters' coming to Madison, Father Delaune left to devote himself entirely to education as president of the new college which Father Sorin was opening in Kentucky. He was in a position to give valuable advice, cognizant as he was after several years of active contact with the people, of the needs and possibilities of education for young girls in America. No doubt Mother Theodore consulted him, and to her insistence in keeping her fingers upon the pulse of American education we may trace the remarkably open-minded attitude toward the adoption of the best along intellectual lines which characterized all the work of the Sisters at this time and later. Their ideals of religious and character training brought from France they guarded, on the contrary as a sacred deposit, modifying them only slowly and gradually in details of execution to fit the independent American character.

As the crow flies, Madison is at least a hundred and thirty miles from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods along the old Indian trail from the Kickapoo villages across the northern boundary of Vigo County, a route which paralleled the Ten o'Clock Line to its terminus at Brownstown and continued on southeast to the Ohio. The route to be followed in 1844, however, was much more circuitous. Logan was ready with his horses and wagon on the other side of the ravine at two o'clock on the morning of August 24 for the five-mile drive to the Wabash. Mother Theodore, by this time an experienced and successful farmer, always took great interest in the appearance of the horses and observed them carefully before starting. They grew to look for an apple or a piece of sugar from the capacious pockets of her dark blue apron. This time, however, it was still dark, and the Sisters had only the dim light of Logan's primitive lantern to help them take their places in the wagon. The party of four were to drive only as far as the ferry where, if the ferryman happened to be on the other side, Logan would have to call across the river and rouse him to pole his ferryboat over for them. Mother Theodore had paid the ferry charges for 1843 shortly after her return from Europe, and the following November she was to pay another lump sum of some thirty-five dollars. The old river road was thick with dust as they drove along in the darkness and the Wabash was at its September lowest ebb. No steamboats would be able to come up the river for months. The early stage from Terre Haute

would take the party to Indianapolis whence they could travel, not over the old Michigan Road which led southeast to Greensburg, but south to take the partly finished Madison and Indianapolis Railroad which, begun in 1836, the first west of the Alleghenies, was in 1844 edging its way northwest from Columbus toward the capital. The journey from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to Madison during all the early years never took less than three days. Leaving Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on Monday morning, the Sisters reached Madison on Thursday or Friday.

Founded in 1811 or 1812, the aristocratic old town was in 1844 in the full tide of its development as first of the Indiana river ports and principal city in the state. It lay midway in Harrison's Grouseland treaty purchase of 1805, only fifty miles overland west of Cincinnati. Product of the steamboat era, the city rose and grew with the prosperity of the down river trade and sank with its decline. The pork and grain from the interior of the state collected at Madison brought back in exchange from the New Orleans market the sugar and molasses, the rice and coffee and salted fish coveted alike by rich and poor, and the handsome clothes, the silks and muslins and wines and spices which found their way into the newly built mansions of the prosperous. These commodities were all purchased in New Orleans where the river trade centered. It was only later, after the development of the railroads, that New York grew as a western market thus supplying an outlet for the large crops which had no incentive when buyers were wanting. The town lies on a deep bend of the river and winds today two and a half miles along its curving bank. Picturesque hills and sharply cut canyons add to the beauty of its natural environment. This is the identical location of the setting of *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, and the old school where Eggleston's hero taught his recalcitrant pupils is still pointed out on the heights above the city. Manners and customs of the period are very apparent in the book: Hannah, the bound girl, the county lunatic kept at the poor house, the spelling school, the distinction conferred by the unique "trip to Bosting," the heterogeneous character of the school which accommodated during the winter among the children the Bud Meanses and Hank Bantas of the district.

Several distinct strata appeared in the population of the town when the Sisters arrived in 1844. An influx of Irish laborers on the railroad had recently augmented the number of Catholics, but the city was predominantly Protestant. Blue blood flowed in the veins of many of the older residents, and aristocratic traditions took root. The wealth accumulated in the river traffic built some of the finest old houses in Indiana still standing. The Lanier house and the Shrewsbury house with their majestic pillared porticos, artistic wrought iron railings, hand carved woodwork, and gracious gardens are nationally known and are in the best Colonial tradition. Indiana's excellent building stone combined to advantage with brick in the ninety-room Madison Hotel with its spacious lobby and central staircase, built in 1850 and long considered outstanding among the hostleries along the river. This handsome building, long the chief hotel in Madison, was destined to play an all but tragic part in the history of the Community of the Sisters of Providence after its unfortunate purchase in 1868. Architect of this and other Madison edifices of the time

was Francis Costigan, a talented Baltimorean, who spent some years in Indiana at this time. He was probably the most distinguished member of Saint Michael's congregation during the pastorate of its founder, Father Shawe, and is said to have designed the church. Father Shawe records the baptism of Francis Costigan's wife and infant son in 1838 and 1839, the register signed in clear round script, "Shawe, A.M.,"

Some of the most devoted and gifted of the early French missionaries of Indiana were pastors of Saint Michael's, among them after the transfer of Father Shawe in 1840 to the Vincennes Cathedral, Fathers Julian Delaune, Maurice de Saint-Palais, and Hippolyte DuPontavice. With means of his own and funds gathered in Canada and the East, the founder had built the church from stone hewn in the gigantic hundred-foot cut through the hill of solid rock north of Madison by the picks and shovels of the Irish laborers.

Father Shawe was succeeded for a short time by Father William Charrier, who left Madison in September, 1841, to join Father Sorin's Community at Saint Peter's. In August, 1842, Father Delaune had spent three years in the Vincennes diocese and had built Saint Patrick's log church at Glendale, Daviess County. He was pastor of Saint Peter's when Father Sorin arrived in 1841 and a year later was transferred to Madison. Here his first care was for the children. Father Sorin sent him a Brother for the boys' school in September, 1843, and on August 27, 1844, the four Sisters of Providence arrived to begin sixty years of devoted service to the people of Madison amid hardships of a different character but greater than they had yet experienced anywhere.

Their quarters were awaiting them, an old nine-room house on the corner of Third Street and Broadway, where the first Mass in Madison had been said many years before. Here they were to live and maintain their school. Both Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Liguori had spent two days in Madison in September, 1840, en route to Vincennes and had met Bishop de la Hailandière for the first time in the inn there, but they had seen nothing of the town. Their house, rented by the pastor at his own expense, though desirably located, roomy, and adequately furnished, had one distressing handicap which later became almost a source of physical danger. It was located nearly a mile from the church. This long distance to and fro must be traversed for Mass in the morning, but it rendered further access to the church later in the day out of the question. Father Delaune quickly saw the hardship this was in the winter and would have been glad to say Mass at the convent once a week. The Bishop, however, would not consent. The Sisters' lengthy devotions of Rule must therefore be made kneeling on the floor of their Community room when closer proximity to the church would have made it possible to perform them in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. So inured were they, however, to hardship and sacrifice that never once in their letters did they advert to this serious disadvantage which had another painful aspect in that it kept them daily for a considerable time on the street where bigotry could reach them.

Experience was to prove that Madison, in many ways so promising a field for their zeal, brought them years of persecution to which the little conspiracy against them in Terre Haute in 1842 seemed a veritable tempest

in a thimble. The town had long been a stronghold of Presbyterianism, a sect which was foremost in organizing the anti-Catholic campaign of the 1830's and 1840's.⁴ Whipped to white heat by vitriolic addresses at their annual conventions, the Presbyterian ministers were foremost in their nativist activities and were ever on the watch for the "machinations of Rome." Southern Indiana had already given a lamentable instance of the lengths to which intolerance could go in the condemnation and year-long imprisonment of the innocent young Alsatian priest. It now turned to the persecution of three defenseless nuns.

Ignorant of the storm their coming had awakened, they turned all their thought and activity to the organization of their little school. Father Delaune was very ambitious for the success of Saint Anne's Academy, and the two Sisters who were to inaugurate the work were well fitted to respond to his wishes. Sister Mary Celestia, a quick and versatile Irish-woman of pronounced literary tastes, was a musician and a poet of sorts well known in the Community for her facility at occasional verse. She was an excellent teacher, devoted and resourceful, and had success of the first order from the beginning in Madison. Sister Saint Liguori had received the best education available in her home at Fougères in France. The precocity of French children, which has often astonished Americans in the life of the Little Flower of Jesus, encouraged Sister Saint Liguori's parents to send their little Louise at three years old to boarding school to the Ladies of Wisdom, who permitted her, as a tribute to her intelligence and piety, to make her First Communion in those rigid times a year before the customary age. She remained at the same school till her education was finished at seventeen, and during the two years while she was awaiting her parents' consent to becoming a religious, she continued her studies at home. She lived to spend only two years in Madison, but they were years rich in merit and sacrifice and she left the school upon a solid foundation of excellence which set the standards for the future.

One of the most valuable of the smaller collections in the archives at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods is the twenty-five letters to Mother Theodore of this gifted young local superior, written in her beautiful flowing script. The first letters are from her early charges at Saint Francisville and Saint Peter's, but twenty are written from Madison and give a detailed picture of the anxieties and hardships, the hopes and fears of those first eventful years. Early in November, however, Father Delaune was writing enthusiastically to Mother Theodore of the success of the school and of the union and prayerful spirit of the Sisters.⁵

The academy had filled up at once with Protestants, and the Irish Catholic children made up the poor school. Sister Liguori had only five Catholics, among them Elizabeth Griffin, daughter of William J. Griffin, an Irish contractor from Pennsylvania. Mr. Griffin's family, Francis Costigan, who was then engaged upon the Lanier house, and Bishop Bruté's old friends, the Blenkinsops from Baltimore, who had a daughter among Mother Seton's Sisters at Emmitsburg, were the outstanding members of Saint Michael's congregation in 1844. The pupils at the Sisters' school

⁴ Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 173.

⁵ 9 novembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

numbered forty-five in all. "We hope much from this mission," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Father Delaune watched over the progress of the school with the utmost devotion and made suggestions as to courses and needful equipment. "Globes would be very useful," he wrote, "if only to give tone to the establishment until the time not far distant, if not already at hand, when the pupils will make use of them in class."⁶ His plans included another American Sister for the coming year. Even among their compatriots the French Sisters were always in America at a certain disadvantage. Mother Theodore's heart was gladdened at her first visit by the admirable dispositions with which the Catholic children received their First Communion and by the assiduous care of the Sisters for their religious education. She hoped that the intolerance in Madison would be short lived.

The Sisters were ridiculed; stones were thrown at them in the streets; they were insulted. But the most bigoted, the most prejudiced against them have already been appeased; two have even sent them their daughters. These children lose their prejudices in our schools, then the parents are won over. . . . These poor little Protestants who had never heard of God, who had been told everything that could make them hate and detest Catholics were all very much astonished in seeing and hearing us. They are completely changed after some months with us.⁷

Prejudice in this city against the school was, however, excessive from the very beginning. Sister Saint Liguori could not devote even a quarter of an hour to catechism during school hours lest she should lose the Protestant girls. "The people are so prejudiced, the ladies worse than the men. But for the former we would have several additional children." Several times ruffians followed the Sisters on the two-mile daily walk to Mass and back, throwing stones and eggs and snowballs, even spitting upon their religious habit, blest and conferred upon them by the Church as a badge of their consecration to Christ. "Sister Saint Liguori has persecution," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to France, "like what we expected. The Protestants are enraged that the Sisters are in Madison. The first day they went with their pupils to Mass children called after them, 'Oh, the old nuns.' One spat upon Sister Liguori, who said afterward laughing that it did not kill her. Others threw stones at them, but God was there to protect them and their school is prospering."⁸

Their first year passed successfully despite all, and the public examination conducted by Father Delaune revealed creditable progress by the pupils. Mother Theodore had sent a box of prizes from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and Judge Cushing of the Circuit Court delivered the address. The *Madison Courier* of July 26, 1845, carried an editorial commenting favorably upon the *distribution des prix*:

As the friends of liberal education and of the Institution of the Sisters of Providence where such an education is secured to pupils, we would fain enlarge upon the well merited encomium which was published in the *Banner*, were not our columns filled. We endorse the appropriate remarks of Mr. Cushing, Judge of the Circuit Court, in his address to the young ladies of the academy, at the close of the day. "The Sisters deserve the esteem and veneration of the community for their successful

⁶ A Mother Theodore, 5 novembre, 1844.

⁷ Mother Theodore à Mgr. Bouvier, 30 novembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

⁸ A ma Sœur Eudoxie, 19 novembre, 1845. S.M.W.A.

exertions in cultivating the mind and forming the heart of their pupils." We have heard his words re-echoed with applause by many, and we hope that the most prejudiced will give him credit for the sense of justice which dictated them. He paid a just compliment to the compositions of the young ladies, and to their accurate knowledge of the various branches in which they were examined by Rev. Mr. Delaune.

We wish success to the Sisters, and we understand that their school will receive a large increase of pupils for the next session. Several branches will be taught in addition to the regular course of English education taught this year; among others the French language, drawing and painting, chemistry and botany, etc. The public will not refuse them a share of patronage. They deserve it the more because they do not interfere with the religious persuasion of the children who do not belong to the Catholic Church.⁹

During their second year in Madison the intolerance which had beset the Sisters seemed to increase instead of lessening. Soon after the Sisters had left Madison for their retreat at the motherhouse, the commendation of their commencement which had appeared in the *Madison Courier* was challenged in the same columns by a local minister who objected to the "inflated puff about the Sisters' school. . . . The design and tendency of this declaration is to throw Protestant parents off their guard, and it may induce some to commit the cultivation of the intellect and the formation of the views and hearts of their children to the . . . servants of Rome."¹⁰ The editor, however, voiced the opinion of the best people of Madison when in commenting upon the communication, he recommended the cultivation of a more Christian spirit to the author and his friends.

Father Delaune had been engaged in a newspaper controversy with a Presbyterian minister named Harvey Curtis upon the alleged sale by the Holy See of Indulgences to commit crime, a favorite subject with anti-Catholic lecturers of the day, and a series of controversial discourses had been given in Madison by the Reverend Dr. Martin John Spalding of Louisville, later Archbishop of Baltimore. The lectures, widely advertised in the newspapers, had attracted many Protestants. Pulpit eloquence was in high regard in pioneer Indiana, and Dr. Spalding was a powerful and learned writer and speaker. Mr. Curtis attacked several statements in the lectures and promised a rival series as soon as sickness in his family, the purchase of new books, and other reasons would permit. Men of the calibre of Spalding and Delaune were formidable adversaries, however, and in the meantime Mr. Curtis devoted his efforts to prevent the return of the Sisters to Madison. Four came back, however, Sister Caroline added to the three original Sisters to teach the younger children of the academy. The school opened satisfactorily and they were able to add French and science to their curriculum.

What shall I tell you of our friend Curtis and the other two who joined him to prevent our return or at least to diminish the success of our school, wrote Sister Saint Liguori to Mother Theodore two weeks after the opening of the school in September, 1845. Two words will suffice. They have left nothing unsaid or undone as you will see from an article from the *Journal* which we are sending. In

⁹ Quoted by Thomas P. Conry, S.J., *Saint Michael's Church, Madison, Indiana*, p. 53.

¹⁰ *Madison Courier*, August 9, 1845.

it our reputation is certainly rendered very doubtful by Curtis and his associates. The other ministers went to the homes of the children, but the flattery and threats which they employed by turns had no effect upon those who gave us their confidence last year. Perhaps you have seen in the *Catholic Advocate* an answer by the Reverend Mr. May of Louisville to Curtis's criticisms of our examinations.

The anger of our enemies is not appeased. Far from it, and they have the courage to take the children against the will of their parents to prevent them from coming to us. They have a secret agreement in which are comprised several ladies whose part it is to go to their friends under the pretext of visiting and supplicate them to be firm with their husbands and not permit their young daughters to be educated by nuns. They are evidently injuring us at present in the number of our pupils and also probably in our reputation among those who do not know us. We have been gratified to see, however, that the attachment of the children for us has not altered, nor the esteem and confidence of their parents. We have been assured that people are indignant at Mr. Curtis's conduct, that his congregation is tired of his scurrilous language, and the number of his auditors is diminishing. We have twenty-six Protestant children, and we expect others. For the good of religion I am glad we returned.¹¹

All during 1845 and 1846, however, the fires of intolerance were kept burning in Madison. At different times groups of hoodlums surrounded the convent at night shouting "nuns" and throwing stones at the house. They belonged, it is true, to no particular religious denomination, but the Charlestown, Massachusetts, convent had been burned by just such a mob. Mother Theodore was very uneasy. Sister Saint Liguori added intrepidity to her other fine qualities, however, and refused to believe for an instant that God who had almost visibly protected them during their first year in Madison would forsake them now. One night early in September the same group of hoodlums were actually climbing the fence to force an entrance to the convent when the young Irish Catholics who had mounted guard over the house drove them off with pistol shots. Earlier the Sisters were accused by the ministers of crimes too absurd to mention were they not believed by the credulous. They were said to have been seen at night climbing into the windows of a school to steal books, and to have kidnapped or murdered a child. When the child was recovered and the criminal punished, no apology was considered due the calumniated Sisters. The best people of Madison, however, were growing tired of the continued agitation.

The controversial lectures of Dr. Spalding took place at night in the church, and as was customary in France, the Sisters were present. The sermons began at seven, but it was ten o'clock when the Sisters returned home in the company of the Griffin family. The subjects discussed were all of controversial character, and Sister Liguori felt it almost necessary for the Sisters to hear them. "We were like Eve," she wrote. "Having looked upon the fruit we wished to touch it and taste it. We assisted at all the lectures. . . . Although the Rule directs us to assist at instructions given in the church, I was doubtful whether you would approve on account of the late hour." The Sisters enjoyed to the utmost the learned and convincing talks of Dr. Spalding on the necessity of religion, the marks of the true Church, the priesthood, and other controverted topics, eight con-

¹¹ 13 septembre, 1845. S.M.W.A.

ferences in all. Curtis, however, by contradicting and falsifying the preacher's statements, did all he could to diminish their good effect upon the Protestants present. Feeling ran so high among their non-Catholic pupils that the Sisters had to forbid any mention of religious subjects. Considerable tact and skill were necessary to deal amiably and successfully with a group made up of elements so diverse, but Sister Liguori had acquired the precious quality of knowing how to live at peace with everyone.

In spite of the danger in which they were, the Sisters continued to attend the evening services at the church. On Good Friday evening they had gone for the sermon on the Passion when a band of ruffians were overheard to say that they intended following the Sisters home. As they were said to have had knives, Sister Saint Ligouri thought rightly that being abroad at night was too dangerous while anti-Catholic sentiment was so acute. She wrote her decision to Mother Theodore:

We went on Thursday and Friday without suspecting anything any more than when we attended Dr. Spalding's lectures. But we will never go again even if we are to remain years in Madison. An indiscreet confidence is not agreeable to God. We have been blamed for not assisting at Lenten devotions. I do not, therefore, regret this little occurrence. . . . It is much better for us to remain quietly at home. We have been told that the Sisters at Vincennes assist at the evening services, but there prejudice is not so active. We will be in no danger in our own house. We will be left in peace, and our fears there will be groundless.¹²

On Easter Sunday, however, a seemingly trifling circumstance all but brought on a religious riot in Madison. Earlier in the year Mr. Curtis had distributed among the children numbers of tracts upon the idols of the pagan Indians comparing their superstitions to the veneration paid by Catholics to the images of the Blessed Virgin and the saints. "These pamphlets were brought here by a Protestant missionary a week ago," explained Sister Saint Liguori. "You see that at Madison there is always someone to rekindle the fires of bigotry."¹³ On Easter day a man had persisted in wearing his hat during High Mass, and finally when he refused to remove it, a Catholic bystander took the hat and placed it on the owner's hands. The man rushed out declaring that he had been insulted and swearing vengeance. For three days while he roamed the town at the head of a band of fifty ruffians, the life of Brother Marie-Joseph, who taught the boys' school, was actually in danger. Rumors of all sorts were flying through the town, and the Catholic women and children were terrified. It was only after repeated efforts that Father Delaune was able to pacify and disperse the malcontents.

The terrible scenes of the Philadelphia riots of the previous year had been reported in the newspapers and were known all over the country, and the events of Bloody Monday in Louisville later during the Know-Nothing agitation, and the Bedini riots in Cincinnati prove that the fears of the Catholics were not groundless. Sister Caroline's youth and inexperience contributed to her fright. "She spent the entire night from Sunday to Monday sitting up in bed. We were all afraid in truth, but not to such

¹² 15 juin, 1846. S.M.W.A.

¹³ *Ibid.*

a degree. For my part, after recommending myself to God I can without much trouble surmount my uneasiness with the hope that He will watch over us. Little circumstances like this are good to excite our confidence in God. Assuredly without Him we could not have escaped for nearly two years."¹⁴ One detail gave them consolation. The prayers they had not ceased to offer for their persecutor Curtis at last bore fruit: "I forgot to tell you, dear Mother, that we have lost our neighbor, Harvey Curtis. He now lives near his church. His loss means one protector less, for he said recently that if anything happened to the Sisters he would be the first to defend them."

The success of the school in Madison was the inevitable result of the Sisters' care and devotedness. Not all the Protestants of Madison looked on with indifference at the intolerance which persistently followed the school. The Sisters' helplessness and quiet devotedness to their work eventually secured them well-wishers. They were openly befriended by one of the most influential families in the Presbyterian church, the very stronghold of bigotry. Jesse D. Bright and his brother Michael Graham Bright¹⁵ were members of the Presbyterian church. The family was originally from New York and settled in Madison in 1820. During Governor Whitcomb's regime, Jesse D. Bright was lieutenant-governor and was later United States Senator for seventeen years. His brother Michael was a prominent attorney. He took his three daughters from the Presbyterian school to send them to Saint Anne's Academy, and eventually himself left the church for his wife's more liberal Episcopal belief. Not till the next generation, however, did the Catholic faith appear in this estimable family. They befriended the Sisters from the first in many ways, and Martha Bright in old age remembered vividly coming home from school to put on a fresh print dress to be at Mother Theodore's service during her visits in Madison for any message she might have. Her long braids flying, she could easily cover the distance which separated the convent and school from the church.

Gradually the fires of intolerance died away, and after Sister Liguori's death, peace and quiet descended upon the old nine-room house on Third and Broadway. The Sisters' days in the classroom were, however, very long, and every moment had its appointed duty. Milking the cow, which was prominent among their morning and evening duties, devolved upon Sister Caroline, who required twenty minutes for this necessary task. At seven-thirty in the morning they left their house for their long trip to church, and a brisk walk made it possible for them to get their breakfast on mornings of Holy Communion before class at nine. They dismissed their pupils at half past four, but Sister Saint Liguori's¹⁶ French lesson kept her till five, and Sister Celeste was busy with her piano lessons till five thirty. From five to six the two novices, Sister Catherine and Sister Carolipe, prepared their classes of the next day under Sister Liguori's direction,

after which one goes to milk the cow, the other to make the fire and prepare our little supper, then all to spend from six to seven in prayer. . . . Sister Celeste has

¹⁴ 15 juin, 1846. S.M.W.A.

¹⁵ Mary Korbly McNutt's grandfather.

¹⁶ Most of the French Sisters had the word Saint in their names and used it, as the Foundress did, in their signatures, though in practice it was generally omitted.

not a moment for study after she practices her music, for she is in class, you see, from morning till evening. She needs a little breathing time the last half hour before six. I have no time for study either before class in the morning nor after class in the evening as after finishing my share of the work I devote the rest of my time to my Sisters. . . . Every morning Sister Celeste practices her music half an hour after Sister Caroline finishes. Besides that she has compositions to correct three times a week.

This last detail at a time in America when it was customary to learn all about rhetoric from a text without ever writing a line, shows the thorough and sterling character of the Sisters' teaching. Sister Saint Liguori insisted upon Sister Caroline's memorizing the maps: "If there remain a few minutes after our Office in the morning, I devote them to Sister Caroline for her geography, for she cannot give a lesson without having the atlas under her eyes, and this should not be in Madison. Although Sister Angelina may have said that it was the custom in this country, we cannot do it in Madison. I go from time to time in the morning to see how Sister Catherine and Sister Caroline are keeping their schools and give their lessons, especially the latter. During the first days I remained with her."¹⁷

Sister Celeste's music class was growing, but despite the fact that during the first year she had taught all day Saturday, Sister Liguori now thought it better for her to have her Saturdays free. They were obliged to take their parlor for a classroom and turn one of the bedrooms into a music room. "Sister Celeste was delighted." They had now twenty-eight pupils in the two divisions of the academy and thirty-four in the free school. This was in September. The second semester, in spite of all the agitation against them, brought their numbers to twenty-one in the upper division of the academy and forty plus in the free school. The music class increased steadily to the end of the year. After Easter Sister Liguori asked Mother Theodore's permission to rise at four to secure an additional hour for study, a plan in which the other Sisters concurred. They were all assiduous in practicing the piano in spite of their crowded days. "I practice an hour a day, at least whenever it is possible, and my Sisters each half an hour. If we may rise at four, Sister Caroline would have from three-quarters of an hour to an hour to practice."¹⁸ They promised faithfully to discontinue the early rising if the health of any of them should begin to suffer. Later in the season, however, when the heat of southern Indiana became oppressive and the mosquitoes kept them awake till nearly dawn, they abandoned their early hours perforce, with the exception of their heroic superior, who was the only one to keep up the practice.

Sister Saint Liguori's last year at Madison was upon them when the Sisters returned in August, 1846. Though neither she nor the other Sisters seemed to suspect it, she had only a few months to live. Their journey was the usual fatiguing experience of those times. They took the stage to Indianapolis where they slept some hours at the Drake Hotel, graciously received by Mrs. Drake whose daughter Ruth was a pupil at Saint Mary's. At eleven o'clock at night they started again, this time directly south on

¹⁷ A Mother Theodore, 20 septembre, 1845. S.M.W.A.

¹⁸ A Mother Theodore, 2 avril, 1846. S.M.W.A.

the stage, which broke down three times on the dreadful roads. When at last they reached the railroad, they had hardly taken their places in the caboose when fire broke out and was licking the hem of Sister Saint Liguori's habit. The intolerance which followed them everywhere in those bitter times was so familiar to them now that they were not surprised that one of the passengers smiled at the mishap, as though, said Sister Liguori, "he would be glad to see the last of the nuns burnt up."¹⁹ At Columbus they had an entire day's delay at the house of Mrs. Gwin, whose daughter Mary had been for several years at school at Saint Mary's. At Madison next day, although they arrived very late, their pupils both of the academy and the free school accompanied by Mr. Blenkinsop, one of the trustees, were awaiting them at the station. As soon as the younger children perceived the Sisters descending from the train they began to dance up and down and clap their hands to the astonishment of the other passengers who watched them all start off together to the convent.

The school opened to a new and promising year. The house had been cleaned and repaired by the trustees, and everything was in perfect order. The Sisters had left for retreat at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods so soon after their commencement and the public examination of the pupils that they had hardly had an opportunity to measure its success. Now expressions of pleasure and approval met them on all sides. Never had they received marks of approbation so general. The school was now reputed the best in Madison, and the parents were delighted with the progress of the children, especially in music and in English composition. Owing to the growing reputation of the school, the number of pupils augmented daily, and but for the miserable prejudice that was still evident, especially among the women, their capacity would have been filled to overflowing. "The Protestant ladies say that if their children do not learn elsewhere, *eh bien*, they prefer to see them ignorant rather than send them to us," wrote Sister Liguori to Mother Theodore.²⁰

The perennial cross of intolerance, however, which the Sisters of Providence in Madison had to contend with during all these early years seemed comparatively light when the powerful helps of the sacraments and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass were theirs to pour into their souls the precious heavenly gifts of grace and courage. But now even these were withdrawn for a time during Sister Liguori's last year in Madison. Their learned and self-sacrificing pastor had left the diocese. During these years such was the prevalence of trusteeism²¹ in the United States that few parishes were not infected with its destructive virus. Prying the congregations apart and loosening the ties that bound them to their pastors, this unfortunate system was for many years the curse of St. Michael's, offering too a source of scandal to outsiders. The trustees were both slow and reluctant to pay the Sisters' salary. Father Delaune had been corresponding with Mother Theodore in May, 1846, regarding the Sisters' return. His plans were then mature, though still secret, to leave Madison definitively in mid-August at the latest. He owned a lot in the

¹⁹ A Mother Theodore, 1 septembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²⁰ 8 septembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²¹ A system devised by Archbishop Carroll of Baltimore, which placed laymen in charge of the financial concerns of the churches.

town which he was leaving to the congregation on condition that they would build within two years a proper house for school and convent to be handed over to the Sisters. Otherwise he would sell the lot for his personal profit. The four trustees signed an agreement with Mother Theodore, but the pastor had not been gone long when they were planning to sell the lot to pay a small debt on the church. No convent was ever built for the Sisters, who remained at their unfortunate location on Third and Broadway till the purchase of the Madison Hotel in 1868 and returned there later for many years.

Madison had been without a pastor from early in June of the previous year. Father Delaune was for some time under ecclesiastical censure and forbidden to say Mass by Bishop de la Hailandière, so that the Sisters had been nearly two months without the sacraments when they left for the motherhouse.

Mr. Delaune has bought for Father Sorin the farm and the entire establishment of the Kentucky Jesuits. The Jesuit Fathers are obliged to leave. . . . They are going to New York. The Brothers will have another novitiate in the Jesuits' house where Father Sorin will be free to give his Brothers to the different dioceses where they are asked for, something which cannot be done in the house in Indiana. I suppose that Mr. Delaune is going there, although he does not wish it to be known.²²

Father Delaune and Brother Marie-Joseph had departed together for Saint Mary's College, Marion County, Kentucky, to replace the Jesuits who at Bishop Hughes's invitation were taking charge of Saint John's College, now Fordham University, in New York. Among them was the apostolic priest who had evangelized Indiana in Bishop Bruté's time, Mother Theodore's old friend and counselor, Father Louis Petit. The Sisters and the congregation of Madison had then been three weeks without daily or Sunday Mass or any of the ministrations of religion. Early in October Saint Michael's received a permanent pastor in the appointment of the Reverend Maurice de Saint-Palais, who remained in Madison, however, only till the close of Bishop de la Hailandière's episcopate.

The first semester of the year 1846-1847 was never to be forgotten. They had one change in their faculty. Mother Theodore sent to Madison in Sister Catherine's place, Sister Michel, Père Michel's youngest daughter, who was named for him. Early in September a part of the city was inundated by one of the floods that still menace the river towns. A torrent of rain of only a few hours submerged many homes so suddenly that eight persons were drowned. Bridges, the recently laid railroad track, and two new factories were carried away; great stones were torn from the hills, and uprooted trees floated like feathers on the angry waters. Though not located in the lower section of the town which suffered worst, the Sisters' convent had two feet of water in the garden. Their provision of wood was swimming in the stable where it was stored, and the cellar was filled to the top. Some of the poor Catholics lost everything, even their clothes, and two of Saint Michael's parishioners were among the drowned. A still greater misfortune to the school, however was impending.

Sometime early in the autumn Sister Liguori contracted a severe cold from which she never rallied. As soon as she was able to hold her pen

²² Sister St. Liguori à Mother Theodore, 15 juin, 1846. S.M.W.A.

she sent news of herself to Mother Theodore, who noted her illness in the diary on October 11. The mail for Terre Haute left Madison only twice a week at this time, but Sister Liguori managed to write by each mail despite her weakness. Sister Celeste was now writing also. On the twenty-fifth, Mother Theodore received a double blow. The physicians had diagnosed consumption in Sister Liguori's case and also in that of Sister Seraphine at Jasper. Mother Theodore acted with her usual promptitude. She sent at once to Jasper for Sister Seraphine and started herself next day for Madison accompanied by Sister Augustine, who would be able to take over Sister Liguori's classes. What the invalid's joy was when she saw her beloved Mother at her bedside must be left to the imagination, but she did not wish to return to Saint Mary's though this had no doubt been Mother Theodore's plan. After a week's stay, therefore, the anxious Foundress returned alone to the motherhouse. A few days later Sister Liguori essayed a report upon her condition, but the fatigue and weakness apparent in her once beautiful flowing chirography must have told more than the details she gave:

This time it is I who am telling you how I have been since Thursday, always a little better, but extremely weak. I can hardly see to write to you though that is nothing. My chest is clearing up every day. The plaster is beginning to dry, but the doctor spoke of applying another. Yesterday and today he finds my pulse less rapid. For the last three days he has prescribed no medicine except some tablets which he says are indispensable now that I have begun to take some nourishment. He wishes me to eat, and I have no appetite whatever. He permits me to have cider and coffee, but since I have been ill I have the greatest repugnance for it, and I cannot take it. All that I care for is milk which the doctor very strongly objects to. He told me this morning that in three weeks I will be able to leave the house.

I will make you laugh if I tell you about my breakfast this morning. . . . My Sisters were at their wits' end to know what to give me. To please them I said to toast me a small piece of bread and send it up to me with a small cup of coffee. They were delighted, and about half an hour later Sister Michel appeared with a great piece of bread at least two fingers thick, tasteless as could be. I took one mouthful but could not manage a second. Poor Sister Michel was all disconcerted to see that I did no honor to her great piece of bread, To satisfy her I took about three spoonfuls of coffee, but that was all. I was sorry afterwards to have been so delicate and not to have eaten a little more, but nothing disgusts me so much as to see displays of bread and heaping plates when I can take only a little. The sight of the food nauseates me. . . . I am compelled to close. My chest is excessively tired.²³

Deceived by the perennial hopes of the consumptive, she reported that she was growing stronger, but it was very slowly. She was able to be up but could leave her room only for short intervals. Twice she had gone downstairs to dinner to please her Sisters, who were worn with anxiety about her. She could stay, however, only a short time when the odors from the kitchen and the noise of the children at play sent her back again. The days spent entirely alone while the Sisters were in class were very long, unable as she was to occupy herself usefully. She had resumed her devotions of Rule, her Office and meditation, but with little success. She was greatly troubled, too, by Mother Theodore's silence, and although we learn from her diary that she was writing two and three letters a week,

²³ 8 novembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

the mails of the time often held them back for days. Now that the rivers were rising the stage coaches were less regular. No word reached Madison till November twenty-sixth. "You know," wrote the poor invalid, "how easily I am distressed, but now it is much worse when I fear that you are ill or that His Lordship is torturing you again."²⁴ She had just one good day in the week, her day of Holy Communion. "Mr. de Saint-Palais remarked it himself and spoke to me of it last Monday. I had never experienced the physical effect produced by the reception of this Divine Sacrament, but now it is too striking not to feel it and to give thanks to God. Oh, when shall I be able to go to church and receive It oftener."²⁵

That day, November 27, a welcome letter full of motherly tenderness came from Mother Theodore and the invalid was consoled. She was not improving however: "I am doing pretty well; I have no strength, but that will come. I cough a great deal still, especially at night. . . . Beer does nothing for me in that respect. I take a little, however, with my food as I think it gives me strength."²⁶ She lingered from day to day with no appreciable improvement. The children missed her and inquired continually when she would return. She was able to go down only once more for a moment. They did their best to keep her, promising not to open their lips lest she would be fatigued. Mother Theodore was again urging her to consent to go home to be cared for in the infirmary, where Sister Seraphine had been installed for over two weeks, but the heroic young superior feared that her absence would discourage the pupils and injure the school. She was, however, gradually growing much worse.

Her last letter was written on November 30. For three days she had been in bed, could eat nothing, was greatly oppressed, and her cough worse. Her nights were almost entirely sleepless, and during part of the day fever devoured her. Incredible as it seems in her weakened state, she felt she needed to be bled. The doctor was ill himself with pneumonia, lung fever as they called it. "You know he told you that I would recover very slowly. Patience is what I need. I wished so much to begin giving arithmetic to the first class, but it is not possible."²⁷ Sister Mary Celeste appended an anxious note:

Our poor Sister has not been well for two or three days, and the good doctor is also ill. I went to see him this afternoon to tell him how she felt. He promised to call tomorrow if possible, but at the same time he advised me to put a blister on her tonight and gave me some other prescriptions which I will attend to. Sister is quite pleased at having the blister. She is much annoyed by the cough and has been also much oppressed for two days. . . . Dear Mother, I am quite uneasy at the protracted state of Sister's illness, but our God wills all things.²⁸

This is the last letter in the collection. Sister Liguori was still hopeful of recovery, still loath to leave Madison. Knowing as we do now the treacherous and debilitating character of her malady, her courage is almost incredible. Letters continued to leave Madison regularly twice a week all during December, Sister Liguori's last month in Madison, many

²⁴ A Mother Theodore, 26 novembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²⁵ 27 novembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 30 novembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

of them from Sister Mary Celeste and Sister Augustine. Early in the new year severe rainstorms succeeded by bitter cold rendered the river bottoms impassable and cut Saint Mary-of-the-Woods off from the outside world for days. Then suddenly on January 13, Mother Theodore received the harrowing news that Sister Liguori in a dying condition accompanied by Sister Mary Celeste and by their kind pastor, Father de Saint-Palais, had left Madison on December 29. For two mortal weeks they had been on the way, held up everywhere by rising rivers and the dreadful roads of the frontier. "We do not know what has become of her," wrote Mother Theodore. "On the fourteenth we learn that our dear travelers are at Terre Haute." How to reach there, and above all, how to convey the beloved and dying Sister in safety home to the infirmary when the horses could not walk on the icy roads was a problem that defied solution. Mother Theodore started out on foot.

I go for her on foot over an abyss covered with ice. Such is the entire extent of the Bottoms. Three times we tried to bring our invalid across in a carriage, but we had to give up and carry her in a chair. Four strong men rendered us this service but with great difficulty as it was impossible to stand upright. Finally after much fatigue and all sorts of danger we were happy to see this dear patient installed in our infirmary of Saint Mary's with our good Sister Seraphine.²⁰

Both Sisters were so exhausted and Sister Liguori so depleted by the fatigues of her long journey that they received Holy Communion as Viaticum on January 17. As Father Corbe had been absent in Vincennes since shortly after Christmas, Father Lalumiere had crossed the ice-bound bottoms to administer Extreme Unction to Sister Seraphine and receive her first vows which were perpetual in view of her approaching death. He remained till after the Epiphany exposing himself again on his return to accident and injury on the bottoms still almost impassable. Father de Saint-Palais remained nearly a week to minister to the spiritual needs of the Community before returning to Madison, and Sister Mary Celestia followed him as soon as the roads across the bottoms became a little improved. She arrived safe at Madison though several accidents had occurred. Mr. Marcile, who was still engaged in the work of completing the village church, had broken his collar bone by a fall on the ice.

With the appointment of Father de Saint-Palais a new era dawned for Catholicism in Madison. Under the influence of his attractive personality, his priestly and gracious manner, bigotry died away. Madison was at the peak of its commercial prosperity. No hint was in the air of how brief that prosperity was destined to be. Father de Saint-Palais left Saint Michael's with regret after a pastorate of only a little over a year, to become Vicar General on Bishop Bazin's arrival in Indiana. A year later as Bishop he thought seriously of transferring both the episcopal see and the motherhouse of the Sisters of Providence to Madison. Later developments have proved that this would have been an unwise procedure, and the new Bishop reluctantly gave it up. During a year under the direction of Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, Saint Anne's Academy and parochial school continued to grow, a prosperity which continued after Mother Theodore appointed Sister Basilide superior in 1848.

²⁰ Mother Theodore's Diary.

CHAPTER XVII

STRUGGLE FOR SPIRITUAL CONSOLIDATION

DEVELOPMENTS AND DIFFICULTIES

"If ever this poor Community is established, it will be through the cross."

MOTHER THEODORE

THE eight-year episcopate of Bishop de la Hailandière in Vincennes beginning in August, 1839, under favorable auspices ended in July, 1847, in something approaching a near tragedy. From the disorder which convulsed the diocese, especially from 1844 on, no individual and no group suffered more than the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The Bishop's relations with the Community during almost all this time were marked by an abuse of power so flagrant as to all but destroy it. But those seven years of sorrow, known afterwards as "the years of our trials," in spite of the Community's sufferings, and perhaps because of them, were the noblest and greatest years of Mother Theodore's life, the years of the refining of her sanctity in the crucible of fiery trials, and a period of steady development and growth in the Community. For, from a human viewpoint, strange to say, the Bishop's opposition then so lowering a threat to their peace and even to their existence, is seen today to have had the effect of the storm which by tossing the branches drives the forest tree to sink deeper roots. The Community emerged from its seven-year purgation purified, consolidated, united in God, notably increased in numbers, and completely organized both spiritually and temporally.

The modern religious Congregations are of two classes: diocesan or functioning with episcopal approval only, and exempt or approved by the Holy See. The religious Communities ordinarily begin their existence in the first class under the protection of the local Bishop, who is often the founder; then, encouraged by the Holy See, they seek papal approbation, which by withdrawing them from the immediate supervision of the local authorities, permits a wider usefulness. Religious, like all other ecclesiastical persons, as they are called, are regulated by Canon Law as "autonomous self-governing groups within the Church under the Hierarchy." This Church Law defines the duties and rights of religious in their relations with the Bishops, the clergy, and the laity. In the diocesan Communities the Bishop holds the powers of superior. Canon Law, however, does not grant him unrestricted sway, but only such authority as is specified in the approved Rules of the different Communities. A Bishop who would wish to command a larger authority may achieve it by founding a Community himself. This was particularly true of the early American religious Communities, most of which were founded by Bishops or priests who during their lifetime usually, though not always, continued to act as superior generals. The spirit of the Church has never been however to place clerics of any rank in charge of the domestic concerns of religious

women. Even in diocesan Congregations the Holy See denies the Bishop direct supervision over the domestic concerns or temporalities, choice of superiors, and the placing of Sisters.¹

The status of the Sisters of Providence on coming to America in 1840 was that of members of a diocesan Congregation removing to a missionary country from the original diocese where it was founded. In 1831 they had been withdrawn from the immediate supervision of their founder and given the status of a diocesan Congregation under the Bishop of Le Mans, then Monseigneur Carron. Four years later their Rule had been written and approved by the succeeding Bishop of Le Mans, Monseigneur Bouvier. They formed therefore a definite organization which the Bishop of Vincennes accepted as they were. They came into his diocese to fulfill the works of charity indicated in their Rule. They were religious, and as such their religious life was their first consideration. Any other proposition would have been unthinkable, and if known, would have halted the arrangements in the very beginning in Europe. The Sisters showed themselves however willing, in consideration of the missionary character of their enterprise, to undertake any works of zeal not incompatible with their previous religious engagements.

Under the circumstances, what were then the rights of the Bishop of Vincennes over the Community? Mother Mary had intended from the first that the American house should be an independent foundation. She gave her reason, that she could not govern a Community two thousand leagues away. Several circumstances however point to the fact that the separation was projected and tentative rather than an accomplished fact. Sister Basilide was not informed of it when she consented to join the missionary band, something which would hardly have been possible if all the other members knew of the decision and if it was definitive. During the years from 1840 to 1843 Mother Mary herself performed several very definite acts of jurisdiction, among them the command to the Sisters to write sealed letters to her after she received Father Buteux's anonymous letter. The separation from Ruillé was not then an accomplished fact in 1840. A further proof is to be found in the urgent and repeated requests to Bishop Bouvier after the Sisters reached Indiana not to permit their struggling band to be detached from the French motherhouse.

Though Mother Mary's attitude was no secret, no question had come up however of Bishop Bouvier's relinquishing his status of rightful superior,² and he remained in possession of his original rights of founder, refusing because of the unknown circumstances awaiting the missionary Sisters, to draw up the contract required by the Rule with Bishop de la Hailandière. The Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were then, from 1840 to 1843 governed by their original Rule and its provisions regarding the Bishop of Le Mans as *supérieur-né*. The rights of the Bishop of Vincennes were therefore to be found in the chapter on the relations of the Sisters with the Bishops of other dioceses where they might settle. This chapter consists of three brief paragraphs, mentioning no specific powers whatever and giving counsels only of courtesy and respect.

¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Article "Religious."

² *Supérieur-né. Constitutions et Règles*, p. 20.

Things remained thus till September, 1843. During all this period it would have been possible with the Community's concurrence to alter the Rule if necessary to fit the conditions of the New World. In September, 1843, while Mother Theodore was in France, the two Communities of Ruillé and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were definitively separated, but on September 30, 1843 the decree of praise preliminary to Papal approbation of the Rule was received from Rome, thus *ipso facto* removing the Ruillé Community from the status of a diocesan to that of an exempt Community not henceforth susceptible to any change whatever except with the consent of the Holy See.

Was the Community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods included in this exemption? It must have been as long as the identical Ruillé Rule was followed. When, however, with Bishop Bouvier's consent the final separation took place, some few changes would have been necessary, alterations sufficient at least to replace the name of the Bishop of Le Mans by that of the Bishop of Vincennes. These changes were never made in his time. Bishop de la Hailandière moreover, though prodigal in promises from time to time, consistently refused to give his approbation to the Rule. Without announcing his intentions, he practically set it aside and refused to be guided by it though the professed Sisters were bound to it by vow. The delays and disappointments which marked the efforts of the French motherhouse to secure Papal approbation of the Rule have already been told.³ Owing largely to these circumstances, the Community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods remained to all intents and purposes a diocesan Congregation till its final approbation in 1887 by Rome during the episcopate of the Most Reverend Francis Silas Chatard (1878-1918).

The codification of Canon Law was one of the great achievements for which Pope Pius X's brief pontificate is memorable. The work had been undertaken at Trent but left unfinished. It was urgently recommended at the Vatican Council of 1869-1870, but the question of Infallibility swamped all other business, and later the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War prevented the prelates from reconvening. The missionary status of the country in America complicated matters in the early years, but the incontrovertible bases of the Church Law were well known, especially to clerics whose education had been received in Europe.

The source of the dreadful difficulties which beset the Community almost from the arrival of the pioneer colony in Indiana was Bishop de la Hailandière's abuse of his power. He began almost immediately to treat the Sisters as a group of lay auxiliaries without rights or obligations of any kind other than those which he himself conferred upon them at the moment. He wished to change their habit as soon as he saw them. He expected them to spend the winter, a group of twelve religious and aspirants in one room in the same house with a family of almost equal number, most of them growing boys. He ignored their Rule, paid no attention whatever to its requirements, and proceeded in general to a line of conduct calculated to destroy the Community. He divided the Sisters into small groups completely isolated from the motherhouse and under the exclusive control of the missionary priests. He blocked the

³ Chapter I.

visitation of the mission Sisters by the superior general, altered the minutiae of their daily life, even the order of the day at the motherhouse, placed and changed the Sisters, took the right of election and profession into his hands, founded establishments without consulting the superiors and without support for the Sisters, and deprived them of the Sacrament of Penance.

His procedure regarding the novitiate was especially despotic and equally destructive. He forced novices on the Community, at least six in the first three years, probably more; he abridged the novitiate and ordered the novices to missions without the knowledge or consent of the superiors of the motherhouse, sent the novices and young Sisters traveling about the country sometimes alone with the young men his nephews; compelled the novices to attend worldly entertainments and to spend hours weekly unaccompanied by a Sister in the parlor. No Community could continue to exist if governed in this manner.

The proper canonical attitude of the Bishop in regard to aggregating new members had been generally known for years in America, and Bishop John England of Charleston, South Carolina, addressing a novice at the first reception into the Ursulines of Charleston, made the following statement:

Where persons are to be associated for life in the same family, it would be unjust that regard should be had to the desire of one not yet permanently aggregated to their number without the full and free consent of those who have bound themselves to permanent residence. . . . They may observe that however desirous you might be of entering permanently as a member of their Community, you may not possess the suitable qualities and in such a case neither your desire nor the Bishop's direction could compel them to receive you.⁴

One more important point, the union and charity which must distinguish a religious house. The Bishop steadily sowed discord inside the Community by maligning the superiors to the Sisters and novices and repeating confidences received in his capacity as Bishop, and by treating Mother Theodore with studied disregard in their presence. He discredited the Community on the outside to the priests of the diocese, to the Bishops of the country in his voluminous correspondence, and to the servants of his household, and to the people of the episcopal city. This last point alone, his efforts to separate the Sisters and novices from their superiors and from one another, would, if successful, have been enough to destroy the Community. It would cause unhappiness and discontent and induce desirable young persons to withdraw and, known at large, would be equally effective in deterring the well-intentioned from seeking admission. One circumstance which made the relations of the Community with the Bishop as painful as they were impossible was the strange fickleness which caused him to esteem and commend one day what next day he decried as outrageous and not to be considered for a moment.

The year 1844 marks a definite turning point in the history of the Community and in its relations with the Bishop of Vincennes. Up to Mother Theodore's return from the journey to France the Bishop had worked his will with the Community. During her absence he had seriously

⁴Quoted in *A Record of Fifty Years*, (H. W. Rokker, Springfield, Ill., 1909), p. 41.

disturbed its peace. This he had foreseen and predicted in January, 1844. The Community had been in fact on the verge of destruction. This he knew and acknowledged. But now Mother Theodore was back with her "French ideas," that is, her inviolable attachment to the Rule they had vowed to observe. All her uncertainties and hesitations moreover were now a thing of the past. She had only henceforth to be guided by the advice given her in Europe. While there she had availed herself of her ample time and opportunity to consult other Bishops and learned ecclesiastics besides Bishop Bouvier, and at once on her return when she heard Bishop de la Hailandière's exposition of his rights over the Community as he had written them to Father Corbe, she accepted them "as the Church intended," that is, with considerable reservations. Their Rule was their only hope as it was their chief obligation as well as their safeguard. Every danger to the religious spirit was wisely met in it and practically every problem solved. Without it they were destined to speedy extinction. With it, under God, they could continue to exist in the hope of better times to come.

Mother Theodore had now also the decisions received at Ruillé in September, 1843, to guide her. The contents of the paper are explicit.⁵ The councilors were later obliged to burn their copy to prevent its falling into Bishop de la Hailandière's hands thus further to embitter their already difficult situation. Mother Theodore's attitude on this and other matters is not always evident. She was an experienced and prayerful executive accustomed to keeping her own counsel. She was however now in no doubt of her duty. One sentence in a letter to Sister Saint Vincent written late in 1844 gives the gist of the line of conduct which had been indicated to her in Europe, "Either we will obey our Rule, or we will leave." Never again was heard the sigh of distress so often on her lips during the first two years, "Oh, if I only knew what I ought to do!"

Her uncertainties were solved, but her difficulties were not lessened. What a painful and delicate situation was hers! Bishop de la Hailandière was commanding in a realm which Church law removed from his authority. His duty was to help and protect them in the observance of their Rule, not to ignore it and render it impossible for them to observe it. His sacred character demanded the utmost deference and respect. Her procedure consecrated by the practice of the saints and the teaching of spiritual writers seems to boil down to the maxim, "Never contravene an express order; otherwise obey the Rule." The circumstances were not altogether new to the Sisters. The three professed had all been members of the Community when for financial reasons the separation from the immediate jurisdiction of Abbé Dujarié had taken place in 1831. Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer were both local superiors and of an age to have taken part in the deliberations of the Community at the time.

Bishop Bouvier's letter to Bishop de la Hailandière, received in January, 1844, was the first formal remonstrance to him from outside the diocese. Considering the high reputation of its author among the French prelates, his letter should have borne much weight. Among many which could have been cited, it singled out a few basic points to reprehend in

⁵ Copy in Notre Dame University Archives.

the procedure of the Bishop of Vincennes toward the Community, his taking from the superiors the choice of subjects, their admission and profession, and the management of temporalities, also his disregard of the Rule. Another point was indicated later, that Sisters who had been professed under one Rule could not without their consent be subjected to another. All these measures if continued would eventually make the existence of the Community an impossibility. This letter, instead of helping them, had only one result as we have seen, to render the situation in the Vigo County woods immeasurably worse. A second admonitory letter from Bishop Bouvier in June, 1844, had no better effect.

In April, after Mother Theodore's return, there were doubtless many free moments for mutual conference and consultation on the affairs of the Community. Then the precious paper written during her last visit to Ruillé in the previous September and approved by Bishop Bouvier was brought out and studied. The immediate result of these deliberations was the decision for Mother Theodore to go to Vincennes and try to engage Bishop de la Hailandière to concur in the resolution they had taken to adhere to their Rule at any sacrifice. Sister Saint Francis Xavier's record gives details:

Mother Theodore was firmly resolved to follow the Rule, above all that point which prescribes the visitation of the establishments, to which he was opposed. She went to see him at Vincennes in May, 1844, at the epoch of the ecclesiastical retreat. She told him that she was convinced that neither she nor her Sisters would have the grace to follow constitutions not approved by the Bishop of the diocese. She therefore begged him to make an extract of the Rules including those he wished us to observe. The professed Sisters would examine them, and if they did not think they were called by God to follow them, His Lordship would not find it amiss if they should withdraw to another diocese in order to observe their first Rule in conformity with their vows. Mother even proposed to remain some months to help to train the subjects whom the Bishop would admit into his new congregation.⁶

An honest, just, even a generous arrangement. It would give the Bishop an opportunity with Mother Theodore's assistance to have his wish, a Community completely at his service for any and every good work in the diocese, over which he would have the exceptional and undisputed rights of founder. He did not give the proposition an instant's thought however but rejected it wholly and at once.

He answered that nobody loved and respected our Rules and Constitutions more than he did; that she was very wicked to speak of leaving him, that she knew very well he had never found a woman like her to put at the head of a Community.⁷

The resolution to leave the diocese was not definitively taken. The Community were however seriously considering it, and from now on the project was always uppermost in their thoughts. It had already assumed definite form in Mother Theodore's mind as her proposition to the Bishop shows. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had long felt that their problems could be solved in no other way. In retrospect it now appeared that perhaps the best that could have happened to them would have been for the Bishop to have carried out his threat not to permit Mother Theodore to

⁶ Annals. Book 1, p. 349.

⁷ *Ibid.*

return to the diocese. Then the other Sisters could have quietly followed her, and they would have been free. She had consulted Bishop Blanc of New Orleans during her two months stay there on her return from France concerning an asylum for the Community in the South. These thoughts may have been in her mind when she wrote to Bishop de la Hailandière in April that she was waiting quietly for him to send her away. The Bishop's reply rejected any such intentions:

As to what you repeat about your mission being finished and of your waiting patiently for me to send you away, you know well that I have not and never did have that thought. You would know if you were willing to recall your recollections what I have done to keep you, to retain you at St. Mary's . . . you whom you well know I have always looked upon as the only person capable of being the superior.⁸

During her May interview mentioned above, seeing that the Bishop appeared still favorably disposed, Mother Theodore continued by asking of him just one thing, but an important, even an essential one, to be able to observe the Rule in his diocese.

"Father Corbe, she said, has read to me the letter in which Your Lordship has explained your rights as Bishop, and I recognize them as the Church intends. I ask therefore to be free to follow our Rule." The Bishop without showing any signs of displeasure replied that our Rules were very wise and that he desired them to be observed. Then he added, "You may observe all here as in France with the exception of the foundation of establishments. I desire nothing so much as to see them observed. . . . I am going to give you the land [at Saint Mary's] that is left. I have sold a part of it but it was not my intention to give you that part. I can do nothing further for you henceforth, but you will be able to manage for yourselves."⁹

Nothing could have been more satisfactory. The Community's two main sources of anxiety were now removed, if they could be assured of being able to follow their Rule and if the site of the academy and mother-house at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods would be vested at last in the name of the Community. The school was now growing rapidly, but the accommodations were far from adequate. The projected wings could be begun at once with the money from France if a clear title to the land were in the possession of the Community. There was no question of purchasing it from the diocese as the Picquet family had already paid for this purpose a sum more than ample to cover the purchase price of some two thousand dollars to Joseph Thralls and the cost of building the academy and enlarging the farmhouse. Mother Theodore's relief appears in her account to Bishop Bouvier of her satisfaction on leaving the Bishop:

I left enchanted conversing interiorly with you and our Mothers. As I had told you previously that we could not follow all our Rules, I flattered myself that I would give you pleasure by writing all this and telling you that now the land is ours. True, we were to receive no more help from Monseigneur, but no matter. Poverty did not affright us.¹⁰

Availing herself of the Bishop's good will, Mother Theodore began to put into effect some of the provisions of the Rule of immediate application.

⁸ 26 avril, 1844. S.M.W.A.

⁹ Mother Theodore à Mgr. Bouvier, 25 juin, 1844. S.M.W.A.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

It reserved to the Superior General the selection of locations for boarding schools and the choice of the Sisters to be employed in them.¹¹ She consulted the Bishop however alleging the excellent reasons which motivated her decision not to keep any resident pupils at Vincennes. Another change she made at this time was to restore the seven o'clock supper hour, also a point of Rule which he had changed to five o'clock during her absence in Europe.

Peace continued for some weeks: "Thus matters stood. Every day we were expecting His Lordship who was to come and give us the land and settle finally all our business."¹² They were however on thin ice. This they knew, but according to the wise spiritual counsel they did not pickaxe it but lived on from day to day storing as best they could by prayer and resignation spiritual strength for the inevitable conflict ahead. Sister Saint Francis Xavier, who knew the Bishop longest and best, was convinced that in the diocese of Vincennes then nor later there would be for the little Community of Providence neither peace nor security nor even the permanence of their religious existence. The Bishop realized that the Community had been in dire straits during Mother Theodore's absence, and he blamed Sister Basilide, but after all she had no power or authority apart from what he himself had given her, inadvisedly as he now acknowledged. He resented Mother Theodore's full and sincere pardon extended to her, "listening to her," he wrote, "and loving her more and more." This was the situation of the Community during the weeks which followed Mother Theodore's return from her momentous visit to His Lordship just reported.

A few weeks later however a letter of very different tone was in the mail. The arrangements had been concluded with the Bishop's approval that in view of the poor accommodations of the yellow house and the youth and inexperience of the novice teachers, no boarding pupils would be received in Vincennes. With His Lordship's permission Mother Theodore had transferred the only boarder at Vincennes to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Now a letter from Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer announced that the Bishop had ordered her to resume the boarding school and as a nucleus to retain the two young girls who were passing through on their way to Saint Mary's. This was done as he directed and greatly to Mother Theodore's regret. She felt that two boarding schools were more than Indiana of the 1840's could support and that naturally the one to suffer would be the still struggling institution beyond the Wabash swamps in the woods of Vigo County. It was at this time that the words "Either we will obey our Rule or we will leave" occurred in the letter to Sister Saint Vincent. This letter was not intended for the Bishop's eyes, but he intercepted it and read it and was deeply offended. As has been noted, most of the letters for the Sisters which passed through Vincennes at this time were taken from the post office and opened by His Lordship. A note in his handwriting on the back of one of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's letters to Mother Theodore tells that he recognized the penmanship and had opened the letter.

¹¹ *Constitutions et Règles*, p. 52.

¹² Mother Theodore à Mgr. Bouvier, 25 juin, 1844. S.M.W.A.

Just here, in view of later developments, one may pause to consider the qualities essential to a successful executive. The prime requisite in a leader is no doubt judgment or its ancillary quality, tact. Some executives look for no other attribute before confiding responsibility to subordinates. An executive must have, if possible, a definite and reasoned plan of action, and the great leader who can carve out an empire, rouse the courage of a beaten and dejected following, and lead them to final noteworthy achievement, needs a full intellectual and moral equipment. He must have vision or imagination to see the complete possibilities of his environment, courage to face its difficulties, a kind heart to win and hold other hearts and command their permanent loyalty, and, if he is to do a great work among a large group, he must have a commanding presence and the charm of gracious manners. Often the prime quality, judgment, must and does suffice. More frequently is it successful if joined to the sympathy of an understanding heart, for a violent and inconsiderate procedure can awaken animosities which will destroy the fruits of the most penetrating judgment. This all on the plane of natural activity.

On the spiritual level, where every work for God and souls must function, no permanent success is possible save by spiritual means. *Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum, in vanum laboraverunt qui aedificant eam.* Piety and self-sacrifice in an executive by their power to draw down the blessing of God sometimes suffice notably for seemingly necessary natural qualities. When the chosen leader can command however the resources of both the natural and the spiritual realms, then he is truly blest and fitted to accomplish great things for God and souls.

Slowly but surely the passage of years has shaken personalities and events in the history of the old diocese of Vincennes into their proper perspective and securely and permanently placed the churchmen and others in their separate niches probably for all time. Bishop Bruté, drawn from his classroom at the Mountain, gathered in less than five years the priests and the equipment which were the crying need of the struggling diocese, organized it, then disappeared, leaving to the clergy and people a shining memory still beloved, still incalculably potent for good. To his successor, Célestin René Laurent Guynemer de la Hailandière, the historian denies the essential quality, judgment. Vision he had, and in a certain measure, organizing ability, a majestic presence, a singularly winning smile when pleased, and notable powers of persuasion. Cauthorn in his *History of Saint Francis Xavier's Cathedral* relates that the Bishop was the finest appearing man in Vincennes and that the young men of the town considered it agreeable flattery to be thought "almost as good looking as Bishop de la Hailandière."¹³ Sister Saint Francis Xavier records in the *Annals* the persuasive eloquence and the insidious charm he could use to win his point.¹⁴ "His frown," however, as his nephew Father Audran remarked, "made everybody quail."¹⁵ Bishop Bazin found him "pious as an angel," but also *méfiant, soupçonneux, entêté*, distrustful, suspicious, stubborn.¹⁶ Mother Theodore early noted in a confidential letter to Mother

¹³ p. 58.

¹⁴ Sister Mary Joseph's translation. S.M.W.A.

¹⁵ Alerding, *History of Vincennes Diocese*, p. 180.

¹⁶ A Mgr. Blanc.

Mary "his double mind and his cold heart," both basic and insuperable handicaps. This last defect, which made it impossible for him to win and hold the hearts of his priests, was the main cause of his administrative failure.

There were other reasons however reaching back to his Breton heritage and his religious and secular education. The Bretons were a singularly spiritual and gifted race. They made up, as we have seen, the major part of both the missionary colony of 1836 recruited by Bishop Bruté and the 1839 contingent gathered by Bishop de la Hailandière. Fathers Saint-Palais, Benoit, Shawe, Deydier, and the Alsatian priests were notable exceptions, but the Bretons among the Indiana missionaries, a group which included both the early Bishops, were outstanding in merit and in devotedness. Sister Saint Francis Xavier used the word *Breton* to signify "something good and frank," and she refers to Brittany as a "pious province."¹⁷ Many of the missionaries considered the "stock of old Armorica" as the best material for the growing American religious communities.

The reverse side of the portrait however shows in the obstinacy which clouded Bishop de la Hailandière's character. Gallicanism, which led the French Bishops to overestimate their authority, appears in his persistent refusal to approve the Rule of the Sisters of Providence which had been praised by the Holy See. Jansenism also entered into his attitude in the rigor which caused him to proceed with ecclesiastical censures and to refuse the sacraments to those who displeased him. When Father Delaune wrote from Madison in 1846 that he was leaving the diocese, the Bishop replied suspending him from the exercise of his priestly functions. During all the early time the Bishop acted as extraordinary or special confessor to the Community replacing the regular confessor at different intervals of the year. During much of this time he refused to hear Sister Saint Francis Xavier's confession, and later Sister Saint Vincent's also. He had finished his training in civil law, the French law founded on Roman jurisprudence with its minimizing of the rights of women, and was a judge when he decided to study for the priesthood. This early mental bent followed him in his later years, and he probably shared also the prejudice against women, despite their immense contribution to religion, which was so marked in the French Church of that day.¹⁸ Mother Theodore was a successful executive loved and efficient in circumstances where he failed. He saw this, no doubt, as others did. He was further influenced probably in his dealings with the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods by the example of some of the other American Bishops and clergy who were founders of Sisterhoods. Their authority over these Communities was naturally larger than was possible over a group imported from Europe with a fixed organization already functioning.

His career on opening held such brilliant promise but fructified only in disappointment. The general unrest began to be evident in growing discontent and disaffection as early as 1840 within the first year of his episcopacy. By 1841 some of his clergy had already abandoned any attempt to meet his wishes or secure his approbation. From then on he

¹⁷ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 210.

¹⁸ Chapter VI.

sought unsuccessfully as he himself acknowledged, for a single friend among his priests¹⁹ now almost all permanently alienated. No one before nor since has assembled for the diocese the equivalent in priests, religious orders, skilled artisans, serving women, equipment, vestments, books, and lastly, money. Add to this his buildings and the church sites he secured. But his priests gathered with such care forsook him one by one. Father Sorin's Sisters and later his Brothers, also in Vincennes the Eudists of Saint Gabriel's College, were driven to other dioceses. With robots he could have worked, but not apparently with human beings.

It is now evident that when he had secured the phenomenal contingent of priests, religious, and funds, and had completed the Cathedral and the first of his buildings at Vincennes, his work for the diocese was largely finished. The supplies of workers and goods he continued to augment, but further than this temperamentally he was not fitted to go. No one realized this better than himself. Before his consecration he had seriously considered withdrawing, and from the first year of his episcopate he spoke openly of his discontent with his position and his desire to resign his dignity and his see. Christ our Lord has fulfilled His mighty promise to be with His Church during all ages in ways past fathoming by our puny mortal ken. The wonder is not that one incompetent and unsuccessful administrator on the fringe of civilization in a missionary country in pioneer times reached the episcopacy, but that given the time and the circumstances, the number was so few.

When Bishop de la Hailandière's resignation twice formally offered was finally accepted, a change took place almost at once. The exodus of priests from the diocese was stemmed in Bishop Bazin's brief episcopate of six months. The atmosphere, tense with fear and uneasiness, was changed for calm and security, and in the succeeding twenty-eight years of Bishop Saint-Palais's episcopal administration there was given to the harassed diocese an era of consolidation, organization, and phenomenal growth in peace and contented security.

Only two portraits of Bishop de la Hailandière are extant, one the oil portrait in the Old Cathedral rectory in Vincennes, the other a frequently reproduced photograph. They seem to represent two totally different persons. The first shows an attractive and intelligent countenance with large dark eyes, the second an older person with the small steel-rimmed spectacles of the time, the face vigorous but lined and without charm.

During the entire period from June, 1844, till the Bishop left for France in November of the same year there was no peace or tranquillity for the Community. From this time on, in fact during the three years and a half till Bishop de la Hailandière's long delayed final departure in the early days of December, 1847, after Bishop Bazin's consecration, the Community climbed daily with the suffering Saviour the painful height of Calvary. They were now definitely and openly in disgrace, and rumors which escaped from the Bishop's dining-room to become generally known in Vincennes and elsewhere made their situation doubly painful. Not having written to Bishop Bouvier since her return to Saint Mary-of-the-

¹⁹ A Mgr. Blanc, 29 février, 1844. N.D.U.A.

Woods in April, Mother Theodore sent him toward the end of June a very long letter already cited detailing their situation and begging his charitable counsels. To this letter, in view of their urgent need of help was joined a circumstantial account of all the difficulties that had occurred during Mother Theodore's absence. These notes later completed by Sister Saint Francis Xavier, still preserved and known as the "Annals," are the most succinct account of "the years of our troubles."

To try if possible to better their situation at the urgent request of her Sisters, Mother Theodore made another brief trip to Vincennes in July hoping to make some explanations which would contribute to a better understanding. Far from succeeding, she learned there that the Bishop had given up all relations with the Community and had appointed Father Corbe their ecclesiastical superior. Motivated as it was by the Bishop's displeasure, this measure was a bitter trial. He had refused to approve the Rule, and now he would no longer be their superior. Mother Theodore besought him to reconsider this harsh decision. He would do so but on one condition, "Write and sign that what you and your Sisters have written to France of me is false." This was the same requirement presented earlier. Then Sister Saint Francis Xavier had made the only possible answer, "It would be to purchase peace at too dear a price to secure it by a falsehood."

The procedure of resigning as superior had been in the Bishop's mind since the previous year when he had spoken to Sister Basilide of appointing a priest as their superior if Mother Theodore persisted in her "French ideas," that is, in her inviolable attachment to their Rule. During this month he must have given the matter much thought, and in a sheet still extant²⁰ kept by him for forty years and found among the papers of his nephew, Father Audran, he wrote according to his custom his reasons or excuses. The greatest of these was that at New Orleans Mother Theodore had made tentative arrangements to remove the Community from the diocese, also that she had seen Bishop Bouvier's letter to him without writing to exonerate him, that she had not intervened in his correspondence with Sister Basilide, etc. The ever present desire to relinquish his episcopate appears in this paper: "*Jetez Jonas à la mer et sauvez le reste.*"²¹ No mention is to be found, however, of the alternative recantation he continued to the very end to require from the Community.

Mother Theodore returned to Saint Mary's, and Father Corbe reluctantly took up the duties of superior saying it would not be for long as he expected to go back shortly to France.

Afflicted to the depths of my heart I returned to Saint Mary's, wrote Mother Theodore, without by my prayers or my tears being able to hinder Monseigneur from rejecting thus a poor little Community still in its infancy. . . . Father Corbe accepted, promising himself to keep the poor little despised Congregation the shortest time possible. . . . We remained quiet for several days fearing every moment the arrival of Monseigneur who had told Father Corbe that not only would he not give us his property, but that he had accounts to settle with me, among them the

²⁰ Notre Dame University Archives.

²¹ Throw Jonas into the sea and save the rest.

day's wages of a horse he had lent us to return from Vincennes and the expenses of our horse while there. He did not come however at that time.²²

Father Corbe, however, now that the fate of the Sisters of Providence in America was in his hands began to show that benevolent interest and compassion which was one of the consolations permitted to the Community in those dark days. It was about this time he gave the two small permissions for the balustrade on the front porch of the academy and for the wooden floor in the basement classroom where on account of the crowded conditions several Sisters slept at night. He also approved the choice of Sisters for profession, especially Sister Mary Cecilia, whom the Bishop, they felt, would never have received despite her excellent dispositions and her fitness. As superior Father Corbe met with the Councilors, now after Sister Basilide's removal at the Bishop's order only three in number.

We elected unanimously Sister Liguori for an associate. As our superior approved her nomination, she came to share our troubles. . . . We felt the need of solidifying ourselves somewhat, therefore after the profession we chose from the newly professed two Sisters to begin a General Council. One is called Sister Marie Joseph, a good child, Alsatian French and formed by Sister Saint Vincent at Jasper, where she is now superior. Since we are so few, our Reverend Superior thought we should admit this good Sister to our deliberations. . . . Sister Saint Vincent and I have titles; she is Madame la Première Assistante and I am Madame la Supérieure. That is a pity, but such is the case. . . . Before separating we elected two additional Councilors, the Superior of Saint Peter's, Sister Augustine, and poor Sister Mary Cecilia. She was in ignorance of everything, but the presence of our Bishop obliged us to tell her all. She is at the boarding school with Sister Basilide.²³

At this time also when with Father Corbe's approval they were trying, as Mother Theodore said, to put a little organization into their poor little undertaking, the Community considered as a body, as has been noted, the Bishop's wish that they should build the wings necessary for the academy despite his determination to retain the site at Saint Mary's as property of the diocese. The unanimous decision was not to build upon a site which they did not own, a very elementary financial safeguard.

Having taken every precaution suggested by prayer and prudence the Sisters separated. The few weeks of liberty from the duties of their missions in the beloved surroundings of the motherhouse and the spiritual blessings and graces of the retreat under saintly Father Deydier had given them all new fervor and courage. Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, Sister Marie Joseph, and Sister Gabriella they had not seen since the Jasper mission had opened over two years before. Now though cruel uncertainty about their future gave cause for grave anxiety, they were one heart and soul in union with one another and in fidelity to their religious engagements.

As it was impossible to foresee the future, they were endeavoring to be prepared for everything. The usual painful rumors reached Mother Theodore before the Bishop's September visit. After he arrived she went three times to the chaplain's residence to see him without success. He went away still in the same dispositions of hostility. In October a letter

²² A Mère Marie, 26 septembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

²³ *Ibid.*

came to Father Corbe containing a number of prohibitions, among them one forbidding Mother Theodore to visit the missions or to leave the diocese. The former was directly in opposition to the Rule²⁴ which required the superior general to visit the houses as often as she deemed it necessary. The second prohibition was to prevent Mother Theodore's going elsewhere during the Bishop's approaching trip to France, to arrange for the Community to leave the diocese. It acted as a serious practical handicap however when during the flood months or when the river bottoms were impassable, necessities could sometimes not be procured except from farmers and millers in Illinois, only a few miles away but since 1843 outside the Vincennes diocese.

By 1844 when most of the pressing debts which had harassed the Community were paid, the financial status of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods seemed in general assured. Poverty and the necessity for economy did not disappear, but the credit of the Community was established, and the Sisters of Providence were no longer pensioners upon the Bishop's bounty. All their purchases in Terre Haute were now paid for at once in cash according to the time honored custom of the motherhouse at Ruillé. A steady stream of money was coming as it was needed from France, no princely amounts, it is true, but adequate to their modest needs. Most of these sums came through Samuel Crawford's general store in Terre Haute. Thus the local merchants knew more or less the state of the Community finances and their willingness to serve increased proportionately. Other facts which became widely disseminated contributed appreciably to the prestige of the Community. In mid-November, 1844, a bill of exchange for fifteen hundred francs from M. Guizot, minister of foreign affairs in Louis Philippe's government, was forwarded to Mother Theodore by the French Embassy in Washington, and a few days later fifteen hundred francs came from the King himself. The Queen of France was also known to have befriended the once despised Community. The French Embassy had sought out the Community through the Governor of Indiana.

The academy was growing and began this year to alter from a small school of limited scope, serving the locality only, to an institution in line with the best in the western country, drawing pupils from both near and far. Thus the momentous year 1844 eventually brought the visible blessing of God. Mother Theodore's quest for funds after many disappointments and uncertainties gradually removed the Community from serious need and made it possible in another year to begin the much needed wings to the academy.

In the meantime after her return from Madison, the usual autumn routine had begun. The labors on the farm required insistent attention for many weeks. The Sisters and postulants helped when the corn was cut, the apples gathered, and potatoes and sweet potatoes dug and stored underground as was customary for the winter. Seven days of hard labor in which all assisted finally shucked and stored the corn, a yield adequate to the needs for the winter, six hundred bushels. Mother Anastasie in old age recalled this heavy labor, which at other seasons included rolling logs

²⁴ *Constitutions et Règles*, p. 13.

and burning brush to clear the fields. Mother Theodore always at the head of the group, made use of every circumstance to instruct the young Sisters and to turn their hearts to God:

Our dear Mother shared our heavy manual labor when she was able. At such times she always turned our thoughts to the spiritual benefit the work suggested. When gathering in the corn and shucking it, attention was called to the full sheaves, the perfection of the ears of corn showing a loving Providence thus so bountifully providing for our needs, also the full ears, she said, denoted the perfection of our work when we utilized all the graces given us. The defective ears reminded us of our want of fidelity. In gathering the fruit the lesson was continually turning attention to the sweetness and perfection of Him Who gave it, and to the fruit of our labors and virtues. In clearing the ground of rubbish and stumps salutary lessons came with that work, about removing obstacles, rooting out obnoxious things and clearing away our faults, thus preparing the soil of our hearts for the seeds of virtue we should plant there.

The beauties of nature were continual reminders to her of the beauty of God, it was a thought she loved to put frequently before our minds. The luxuriance of the foliage suggested the bounty and infinite power of the Creator, the beauty of winter in its snowy mantle, the purity of soul and the splendor of that spotlessness. And all these things, she would exclaim, with the sweetest expression of loving admiration, were made for man's use and benefit—were made for *me*. And "O mon Dieu, je vous aime de tout mon cœur," softly died away on her lips as she lapsed into silent communings with the God she so loved.²⁵

During those early years Mother Theodore was still acting as mistress of novices assisted however by Sister Saint Francis Xavier who, though she gradually took over many of the duties of the office, could never be appointed to it on account of Bishop de la Hailandière's opposition to her. The days of heavy outdoor toil she still was compelled by her poor health to spend in the house. "All our Sisters have been in the fields with Mother Theodore," she wrote to Ruillé, "for five or six days. They are working from morning till night to gather the corn for the winter. I feel ashamed to be in the house." In mid-September on the octave of our Lady's Nativity the *Veni Creator* was chanted in the chapel for the three postulants who had accompanied Mother Theodore from France, Sister Mary Therese Delahaye, Sister Monique Tiennox, and Sister Lawrence Cheminant, whose formal novitiate was now beginning.

Next day the academy opened, but with the leisurely attitude of the frontier, only seventeen pupils arrived the first day. The Mass of the Holy Ghost was celebrated however by Father Corbe, and two days later the number had risen to twenty. This year (1844) Sister Basilide was again in charge with Sister Mary Cecilia and Sister Angelina as efficient aids. In Sister Saint Francis Xavier's opinion Sister Mary Cecilia whom she had once described as "the daughter of a savage but very gifted," had been greatly benefited by the voyage to France.

This poor Sister Mary Cecilia, she wrote to Mother Mary, I assure you if you like her, she also loves you much. She told me that she found you far beyond what I had promised her. Her voyage has been, I think, of great advantage to her. Mother Theodore wished her to draw the spirit of our congregation from its pure wellspring. She will not regret having taken Sister to France as she will be able

²⁵ Mother Anastasie's personal notes. S.M.W.A.

to accomplish much good here. In spite of her passions she wishes to serve God perfectly. . . . We live agreeably together and will try to assist each other to Paradise, a difficult task in this country.²⁰

Sister Angelina was a definite acquisition, a finished musician, and a very successful teacher. She was of Irish parentage, a niece of the saintly Bishop Michael Egan, Bishop Conwell's predecessor in the see of Philadelphia, and had received an excellent education from the Sisters of Charity before she joined them at Emmitsburg. Her cousin, Sister Mary Egan, who was also a member of the order and the first novice to die, passed away in Mother Seton's arms in 1817. Her brother, the Reverend Michael de Borgo Egan, was president of Mount Saint Mary's Seminary for a time (1826-1828) till failing health sent him to France where he died in 1829 at the age of twenty-five years in Marseilles. Their uncle, the saintly Franciscan Bishop of Philadelphia, had come from Ireland as a missionary and was made Bishop in 1810. He died four years later in the midst of the troubles from trusteeism which racked that diocese for so many years. His sufferings caused him to be held a martyr to the rights of the Church. Sister Angelina had spent her early religious life as a teacher at Saint Joseph's at Emmitsburg. She was later appointed to Vincennes and was there persuaded by Bishop de la Hailandière to transfer to the Sisters of Providence. She became a devoted and exemplary religious at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and filled a distinct need as a music teacher at the academy. She also acted as Mother Theodore's English secretary until her untimely death of tuberculosis in 1851. She occupied a small stool next Mother Theodore at recreation where she was able to correct her English pronunciation. She was deeply devoted to the Foundress and to the Community, and her death was a very great loss.

Although the church was sufficiently finished for use for divine service from Christmas, 1843, when the village children made their First Holy Communion there, as we have seen, work had continued sporadically upon it all during the past year under young Jacques Roquet. He was now married and established with his young wife, Mary Friel, upon part of the Friel quarter section later known as Rosary Hill, a mile from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on the North Arm road running west into Illinois. Father Corbe had been placed in general charge of the work by the Bishop, and under Roquet's direction, two or three men who lived at the farmhouse with the men employed on the Community farm placed the windows, and partly completed the church. The Bishop, however, spent no more money on the edifice. He evidently expected Mother Theodore to spend the money she had collected in France on it. In April, 1845, the walls were still unplastered, and there were no pews.

The Bishop came for a week in September to oversee the work. The two permissions which Father Corbe had given for a balustrade at the academy on a porch, where the children were exposed to falling, and for a plank floor over the damp bricks in the basement there had not met with His Lordship's approval. Despite the fact that Father Corbe was now Ecclesiastical Superior of the Community, the Bishop still retained close supervision over the smallest alterations and repairs, and in general

²⁰ 13 avril, 1844. S.M.W.A.

over the buildings and improvements of the grounds. A few weeks later he wrote:

To MR. CORBE, October 20, 1844.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

I have just received your letter. I do not disapprove of the balustrade that you have made; but I will not contribute one cent toward it. As to the plank floor to be laid over the brick floor, I am positively opposed to it. Let the Sisters put a carpet if they wish to do so. I will see whether Marcile will pay Louis Alvey—and if Joe Thralls has not received his money it is his own fault. Why did he wait so long before asking for it? I owe hardly anything to Marcile; if you have to pay one or the other, or both, you have on hand the best part of what is due them . . . you say, and then \$15.00 that I paid to the French merchants that you will be kind enough to get back since they sent me nothing of what I ordered of them, and which I was obliged to procure at Vincennes.

I have just looked over Marcile's account. I find that he is indebted to me. I cannot, therefore, pay Thralls—why did he not ask sooner? Let him settle matters with Marcile; I would not pay Alvey either if I had not compassion on him. I send you then \$20.00. Mr. Martin advanced to the plasterers two or 2½ dollars. My account for the Sisters, which last year amounted to \$2,255.11½ must be increased by \$215 paid to Marcile. It is then \$2,470.11½; that is, nearly 13,000 fr. + 6,000 fr. received in France.²⁷ 19,000 fr. + \$552 spent this year; 22,000 fr. That is more than would be required to build a fine church. . . . I write this because it seems to me that you do not understand it. Only one word more about them: As Bishop of Vincennes—and whatever they say to the contrary—I forbid positively any Sister being sent or remaining alone in an establishment; that anyone travel alone without special permission from you or myself; that anyone go out of the diocese. As for the Mother, I oppose her visiting the establishments of the Bishop without his permission, or in my absence from the diocese, of yours only. I should have much more to say, but it appears that the time has not yet come; let us then await the time marked by Providence. I have confidence that things will not remain as they are. Adieu.

All yours,

CEL. Bp. of Vinc.²⁸

Sunday 6 p. m.

His Lordship returned early in November accompanied by Father Shawe to preach a retreat for the congregation and to officiate at the dedication of the church. He was usually accompanied at this time in his journeys throughout the diocese by this learned and eloquent English priest who invariably attracted a number of Protestants to his sermons. Protestants in remote sections of the Western country often listened eagerly to religious discourses from Catholic missionaries to supplement the annual summer camp meeting, their only religious opportunity of the year. The practice of taking an eloquent English-speaking priest as a companion on his tours had long been customary with Bishop Flaget in Kentucky, who was usually accompanied by one of the well known Kentucky pulpit orators "to draw the crowd."

By this time most of the ornaments sent from friends in France for the Sisters' chapel had been transferred to the church, but the niche above and behind the altar there was still vacant. Two days before the date

²⁷ Given to Mother Theodore by the Propagation of the Faith in Paris.

²⁸ S.M.W.A.

fixed for the dedication ceremonies Bishop de la Hailandière accompanied by a group of workmen came for Mother Theodore to make a tour of the grounds and discuss the improvements he had in mind, the planting of apple trees, and making walks. When they left the house, the workmen remained behind. On her return to the house Mother Theodore went at once to the convent chapel and as she had expected, Bertaudière's Madonna was gone. It remained in the village church for nearly nine years when Bishop Saint-Palais restored it to the Community. The workmen when removing the statue, without noticing it had accidentally broken off one of the hands which the Sisters picked up and carefully preserved. When Mother Theodore's Providence, built in 1853, was ready for occupancy, the cherished statue was brought back and placed there in a niche prepared for it. In 1863 it was transferred to the new temporary frame chapel and was saved from the fire of 1889. For many years this treasured relic of early days has been preserved and honored in Providence Community room. Originally it was painted in delicate colors, but to make it harmonize with the surroundings it was later painted white.

Next morning, November 10, the Bishop performed the dedication ceremonies assisted by Fathers Corbe, Lalumiere from Terre Haute; Shawe, Bellier, and Buteux from Vincennes, and Mullen from Scipio. Father Corbe noted the event in the church record still preserved.²⁹ Indifferent to a heavy rain which drenched them almost immediately, the Bishop and most of the missionaries left next day. After a Requiem Mass for Bishop Bruté and the deceased priests of the diocese, Father Buteux also went away, the last to leave. He had been on the faculty of Saint Gabriel's College but departed for Mobile a few days later not to return permanently to the diocese. After the feast of the Epiphany he was back at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for a farewell visit before embarking for France.

For days before the Bishop's arrival Mother Theodore had prepared by prayer and a retreat which closed the day he was expected. They had all hoped much from this visit, but they had to abandon hope when His Lordship again proposed his terms. Peace could be procured but only by a signed statement that the facts they had written to France, the sudden profession of the two novices, Mother Theodore's deposition and re-election, and the accepting of novices and establishments and the placing and shifting of Sisters without the knowledge or consent of the mother-house, in fact, all that had taken place in the summer and autumn of 1843, that their account of all these events was false.

As Sister Saint Francis Xavier had been the first offender, the Bishop approached her this time personally hoping to receive a signed retraction from her which he could present to his critics in France. She had already written at Mother Theodore's suggestion a humble letter of apology for anything wrong she had done. "Now, my child," he said, "you have repented. You will be again my cherished daughter. I consent today to hear your confession, and since you are willing to retract what you have

²⁹ His Lordship also administered the sacrament of Confirmation, and among those to receive it were Sister Anastasie, a postulant, and two others who eventually entered the Community: Mary Thralls (Sister Isidore), and Margaret Gorman (Sister Eugenia).

written, I forget the past and I pardon you." No one had suffered as she had done, but neither now nor later could she purchase pardon and peace by a falsehood. She was also too well instructed not to know that this was what Our Lord meant when He spoke of persecution for justice sake.

If Monseigneur's indignation was extreme, Sister Saint Francis Xavier's grief was not less so. Our good superior who knew from experience how painful it is for a religious to live in disgrace with her Bishop, endeavored to establish peace. Monseigneur . . . went to her room and complained of what had occurred. Our Mother sent for Sister Saint Francis Xavier telling the Bishop that she was sure Sister would do everything in her power to satisfy him. "Tell her yourself" added Mother, "what she has written that was false." Monseigneur finding nothing, declared she was wrong to write facts that were true and that as Bishop he demanded a reparation in writing which he could present to the Bishop of Le Mans. He left Saint Mary's still very much displeased with this Sister who had constantly refused to retract the truth.³⁰

This demand for a retraction when presented to Mother Theodore was under a somewhat different form, to write and sign that the Bishop had never done anything contrary to the Rule,³¹ but even if his recent prohibition as to visiting the houses was not considered, no such statement could truthfully be signed. When he left this time, though nothing was settled regarding the future of the Community, his displeasure was not so evident, so painful.

Now that the way of permanent public humiliation and sorrow was opening before the Community, what, it may be asked, was their attitude? Mother Theodore was now resigned to carry this strange painful cross as long as God willed. During all this time it never grew less but on the contrary seemed with each succeeding year to become heavier, more crushing. Its source too rendered it doubly painful, this prince of the Church, who, however, ill advised his measures toward the Community and the diocese, was yet their spiritual superior. The very inexplicable character of their trials had however drawn them so near to the Heart of the suffering and calumniated Jesus that sin and sin alone they feared.

They knew the Bishop's ideas and they also knew that they were erroneous:

. . . to oppose the views of the Bishop was to revolt against God Himself; that the Bishop alone had authority over us, and that the last priest in the diocese had more power over us than our Superior General; that there was a way which seemed right to man but which led to death, that one must be very proud or very blind to disobey a Bishop, etc. I write this, continues Sister Saint Francis Xavier, for those of my Sisters for whom God prepares perhaps similar trials, for there are none more terrible than those which show us sin and hell as the price of our constancy. Let us not be discouraged. Let them remain firmly united to their Mother no matter who she is, as long as she herself remains faithful to the Rule.³²

These are courageous words and they were the rule of conduct of their author, but she herself who wrote them so bravely sank under the continual struggle necessary to put them into effect.

³⁰ Annals. Book I, p. 353.

³¹ A Mère Marie, 26 septembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

³² Annals. Book I, p. 340.

Candidly, my Father, wrote Mother Theodore to Bishop Bouvier, I do not know whether I could live now without afflictions; they give me great confidence. I am permitted to receive Holy Communion frequently. There it is that I find strength to endure them. Our good Sister Saint Francis Xavier is overwhelmed by them; her strong, generous, loving soul bears them, but the efforts she makes are destroying her feeble health without all our care being able to prevent it. The Bishop of Vincennes is unwilling to hear her confession; he told her in my presence the other day that never would he absolve her until she had retracted everything she had written. Sister Basilide and I are in the same predicament, for since the month of July the Bishop requires but one thing of us to reinstate us in his good graces, that is to write to you that he has never done anything contrary to our Rule. It is clear that we cannot do that, but we are not expiring on that account. Instead poor Sister Saint Francis Xavier is dying. It is quite possible that His Lordship will no longer find her here on his return. There will be one less to suffer.³³

Sister Basilide too was crushed by the Bishop's unrelenting anger. For some time now she had been renewing her urgent requests to Mother Mary to recall her to Ruillé. In view of the continued difficulties with His Lordship, Mother Theodore was willing for her to go, though she knew that if the Bishop would treat her amicably all would soon be over.³⁴

In considering the attitude of the Community at large during these troublous times, it is important to separate the councilors and the elder Sisters, who were informed of everything, from the younger Sisters, the novices and postulants, who lived from day to day carefree and light-hearted to the end, in many cases in complete ignorance of the sorrows and difficulties of the Congregation. "We have here despite our miseries some good and innocent novices," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier at this time, "who enjoy in peace the happiness of belonging entirely to God. They are happy in knowing nothing of our troubles."³⁵ Mother Anastasie, then a young Sister on mission at Vincennes at the very crisis of the affairs of the Community and the diocese, knew nothing, even the very day when the small group of weeping Sisters smothering their sobs went along Market Street to the old Cathedral to seek help and strength before the Blessed Sacrament and ended in Bishop Bazin's parlor. The missionary Sisters were in general better informed than those at home, as the rumors current concerning the Community reached them first. The Bishop, too, visited the missions and spoke openly of his displeasure against Mother Theodore. They were said at Madison to be lost and that the demon was loose at Saint Mary's. Even years later they were referred to as "that rebellious Community in Southern Indiana."

During all this time of trial Mother Theodore's gentleness and gaiety were unalterable. No word or sign before the Community betrayed the cruel anxiety and the harrowing thoughts which were with her day and night. Only rarely in the confidential letters to France and to the priests in the diocese who knew her circumstances did she reveal her sorrows. To Father Martin, the Vicar General, whose prayers and counsels she valued highly she wrote:

The expression of your good will toward us has consoled my heart and sustained my courage. Sometimes I feel almost sinking under the weight, not only of present

³³ 30 novembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ Mother Theodore à Mère Marie, 28 octobre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

³⁵ A ma Sœur Eudoxie, 19 novembre, 1844.

miseries, but still more perhaps, under the apprehension of future misfortunes with which we are threatened. Pray, oh pray, for our poor Congregation, so young and yet already so tried. Do not say that you can do nothing for it. Indeed you can hope much from God and from man.³⁶

She had written to the same correspondent a few months earlier:

Sometimes I am so disheartened in this country . . . that I feel as if I were carrying on my shoulders the weight of its highest mountains, and in my heart all the thorns of its wilderness. Pray for me occasionally that I may not lose courage; nay, more, that I may be brave enough to hold up others who sometimes falter.³⁷

From Bishop Bouvier and the French superiors there were of course no secrets, and in fact the story of these sorrowful years would not be known today, so careful were the Sisters out of respect for Bishop de la Hailandière's sacred character to conceal everything, but for the fact that the originals of the confidential letters to France seeking counsel and direction were returned in recent years to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. So guarded were the older Sisters not to offend against charity that Sister Saint Francis Xavier would not allow herself to discuss with Sister Saint Liguori who was then a local superior their troubles of the summer of 1843.

To this unvarying silence they added patience and humility under the mighty hand of God. No word of recrimination or complaint escaped them, and no possible means of conciliating the Bishop short of sin were neglected. These overtures often had an effect entirely opposite from what might have been expected:

Vincennes, July 7, 1844.

Madame la Supérieure:

I did not need your letter in order to know that you could not have your retreat unless I authorized it; as on your side you knew very well that Father Deydier was the one I had made choice of to give it—that is not the question but to know at what time or rather at what date of the month of August you prefer to have this retreat. I left the choice to you. Your letter is not precisely an answer to those things. The display of submission and of dependence, of which it is full, is of a nature to produce a contrary effect to that which you ought to desire. An excess of politeness is often only discontent badly disguised. What is here the cause of your displeasure? I do not know—but it seems to me to have come on very unseasonably. There is nothing in it which may cause us to forget the things which have occurred.

CEL. Bp. of Vinc.³⁸

They strove also during these years of trial by an unswerving fidelity to merit the blessing of God upon the Community, knowing the priceless value of the cross. This thought recurs again and again in Mother Theodore's letters of these years: Temporal prosperity will never found a religious house. That can be accomplished only by prayer, crosses, and trials:

. . . In all, I can truly say that there is not a single circumstance in which his Lordship can oppress us of which he does not profit. All this is told you, my good Mother, without any bitterness of heart. It comes not from man, I am convinced,

³⁶ *J. and L.*, p. 93. Letter of January 7, 1845. (dated incorrectly in *J. and L.*).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 138, October 3, 1844. S.M.W.A.

³⁸ S.M.W.A.

but from the demon who spares nothing to destroy a work which is destined to do immense good in this country, and which is already accomplishing it. The fruit of so many sufferings, physical and moral, borne for God, count already for something. . . .

Good Sister Saint Francis is still my consolation. She knows how to pray, and that is much, yes, very much. Only by prayer can we hope to leave the wretched situation in which we are. Oh, if we only had among us one of these saintly and fervent souls who have in some sort the keys of heaven in their hands, we would obtain all, but we are only poor insignificant persons who have not made the first step in the way of virtue, but certainly without any lack on the part of God, Who provides us with sufficient opportunities. Oh, my God, when shall we learn to love Thy cross and Thy humiliations? Ask these graces, my good Mother, for her who will be always in Jesus, our Lord, your very affectionate daughter.³⁹

Their greatest trial was the fear and uneasiness for the future which now pressed with a crushing weight upon the Community. They had known for some time that Bishop de la Hailandière was planning a voyage to France:

Monseigneur has just spent a week here, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Sister Eudoxie at Ruillé in November. He is leaving next week for France. Sometimes I feel so oppressed that I seem to be shut up in a barrel of dried herring. I am very happy in having Mother Theodore, still happier to have our beloved Jesus, for He alone is able deeply to console our hearts. I learned about a month ago of the death of poor Abbé Cardonnet. God had sent him over a year ago the frightful malady of epilepsy. He fell sometimes into the fire, sometimes on the rocks, and was covered with wounds. He has been, I hope, purified from his faults by his sufferings. He wrote some time before his death asking me to pray for a continuation of his sufferings. This was the sole token of gratitude he asked of me. O my poor Sister Eudoxie, on learning of this death I found my old heart again, and I mingled my tears with my acts of gratitude and resignation.⁴⁰

Not till nearly a week after the Bishop had left Saint Mary's did they learn of his precipitate departure from Vincennes for Europe on November 18. In those days when the mails were still slow and uncertain, the missionary priests and Sisters often acted as intermediaries in delivering letters and parcels in France and in America. Often their precious letters were lost, or missing the opportunity, were returned to them months later, if at all. On this occasion only Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer in Vincennes knew of the Bishop's impending voyage soon enough to avail herself of the occasion, but he sent word that he had destroyed her letter, as it was sealed and addressed to the Superior General at Ruillé. The Bishop's voyage which included a trip to Rome lasted almost a year. He was not back in Vincennes till October, 1845. During this period of comparative calm, important matters affecting the future of the Community were considered and in some cases settled, but the unrest in the diocese instead of abating spread and increased.

³⁹ A Mère Marie, 28 octobre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁰ 19 novembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

CHAPTER XVIII

PLANS TO ESCAPE FROM INDIANA

"Providence of God, resource in all our necessities."

LITANY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

BENEATH the surface of the events narrated in the previous chapter momentous questions were under discussion at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, questions of permanent and far reaching importance. The project of escape from the harassed diocese of Vincennes had been actively in Mother Theodore's mind as a definite plan from the time of her visit to His Lordship in Vincennes in the previous May (1844). She then made her proposal to him that since he evidently did not wish to approve their Rule, she herself and the professed Sisters, also the novices and postulants who wished to follow them would retire to another diocese, and if desirable she would remain for some months to help him to found a new Community more in harmony with his desires. He indignantly rejected this just and even generous solution of their troubles, but the plan to escape did not leave her mind. In the long letter written to Bishop Bouvier in late June Mother Theodore returned to it with increased and definite details. They had already chosen tentatively a diocese and a location in which to take refuge, the newly formed diocese of Chicago a part of which had been cut off from the old Vincennes diocese in 1843. Now the difficulties regarding the boarding school at Vincennes and the refusal of the Bishop to vest ownership of the site at Saint Mary's in the Community, though urging them and requiring them to build, had added to their uncertainties, and made some decision an immediate necessity:

A boarding school at Vincennes would ruin ours in this unfortunate forest which for three months it has been impossible to reach. We can pass over the bottoms only at the peril of our lives. . . . Everybody says it is impossible to do good in the Diocese of Vincennes, and candidly, I believe it after what has taken place between Monseigneur and ourselves during the past three months. . . .

Now, what would you have us do? Remain here? In this case one would have to set aside the Rule and have an institution that, directed as the Bishop wishes, would do more harm than good. Must we return to France? In that case, what would be done with those poor daughters who have left all that was dear to them and come to us to be led to God? And what shall we do with the money that was given in charity to the mission? These are questions that broken-hearted I put to you, my Lord; for I have received from your hands the dear mission of Vincennes and you know whether I love it.

We have thought of proposing to Your Lordship a measure that appears to us feasible. You know that this Diocese has been divided. A Bishop has been named for Chicago who is said to be pious, zealous, full of talent. Four of our best missionary priests have remained in that diocese.¹ This portion of the missionary field of the United States is still very uncultivated. One would certainly have to suffer much, but that would not affright us. So we think that if you permit it we would

¹ Fathers de Saint-Palais, Fischer, Guéguen, and DuPontavice, all of whom returned to the Vincennes diocese during 1844.

remove to that diocese, or at least that we would propose it to the Bishop. Sister Mary Cecilia has some property there. She offers a piece of ground a few miles from the episcopal city where we could establish ourselves. We would go there with those of the Sisters who wish to follow us and whom we would accept. The others would stay with the Bishop of Vincennes, who could then do as he liked.

I repeat, Monseigneur, it is with great sorrow that we propose these difficulties for you to solve. If your paternal goodness can find a means to save us, in working to save others, employ it. Your counsels are orders for us. We shall do only what you will tell us to do. I shall take the liberty to say to Your Lordship that the first time I received Holy Communion in America I renewed my vows and added another, that of consecrating myself forever to the missions, if my superiors did not recall me to France. I entreat you, Monseigneur, do not abandon us. After God we have only you for refuge. Have pity on your poor daughters of the woods.²

The locality chosen for the new foundation was the old French homestead of the Bailly trading post in Porter County, Indiana, on the edge of the beautiful but barren dunes of Lake Michigan, not in the diocese of Chicago, however, as Mother Theodore had thought. All of Indiana was still included in the Vincennes diocese. As one of the four living daughters of Joseph Bailly de Messein at his death in 1835, Sister Mary Cecilia had a claim upon what remained of the immense tract of land owned by him on the Little Calumet River. Two of her sisters, Esther³ and Rose,⁴ were married and settled elsewhere, but Madame Bailly their mother, spent much time at the homestead with one of the daughters of her first marriage, Theresa de la Vigne, and Hortense, the youngest of the family, later Mrs. Joel Wicker, but at that time still unmarried. The Community would be obliged to build at once, but with the money which remained from Mother Theodore's quest in France, which they had reserved to erect the now imperative addition to the academy, this would not be an insuperable obstacle. The remoteness and isolation of the locality made it however the worst possible choice. Bishop Bouvier saw this immediately. It was however a refuge far from Vincennes and available at once, but these were its only advantages.

To Mother Theodore it seemed that no location could be worse than their "unfortunate forest." All during the late winter and spring of this year they had been entirely isolated by the flooded Wabash bottoms on the Indiana side, and the Bishop's prohibition had cut them off from Illinois. Again during this period when the water had begun to subside, as several times before, they were obliged to have recourse to the Macks-ville, now the West Terre Haute road, along the terrace to a point directly opposite Terre Haute. Though the entire distance was considerably farther and this way on that account was but little used in pioneer times, the crossing through the bottom was proportionately shorter than by the usual diagonal River Road. Often in flood times, despite the large high water wheels which lifted the pioneer vehicles as far as possible above the ground, the water came to the depth of a foot into the carriage. During all the early years, Sister Mary Eudoxie tells us, the "wagine" was

² 25 juin, 1844. S.M.W.A.

³ Mrs. John H. Whistler.

⁴ Mrs. Francis Howe.

their usual means of transportation, but they still had the Bishop's little "carriage" which he had given them during their first year in America, a small phaeton for two persons to which Mother Theodore could always drive Mignon or the little gray mare Finette, which they had reared.

After the long and important letter to Bishop Bouvier was dispatched in June, the Sisters were consumed with anxiety as they waited the intervening months for a reply. Ocean travel and consequently postal service was much better in the summer as the Atlantic steamers and sailing ships crossed over the Northern route straight east from Newfoundland in less time. Summer however was a busy season for Bishop Bouvier, and his reply was not forthcoming immediately. He brought to bear upon all their difficulties submitted to him not only his own wisdom and learning but also the delaying action of prayer and counsel. Not till September, at the close of the annual retreat at Ruillé, was he able to consult with the superiors there upon the contents of Mother Theodore's letter. He wrote to her as soon as possible after his return to Le Mans on September 18, 1844.

The Bishop made it clear at once that in view of their separation from the French motherhouse he could give no orders, as the American Community was no longer subject to his jurisdiction. Wise and prudent counsel he *did* give however in generous measure and the active help still in his power. But to the deep disappointment of the waiting and anxious hearts at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods his answer was in the negative and must have seemed the death blow to their hopes. They knew well that if they expected ever to leave the diocese now was the time, when Bishop de la Hailandière and his threats of excommunication would soon be gone, perhaps never to return. His wish to resign, which had first deeply wounded, then alienated his priests with only a few exceptions, would no doubt now be put into execution. Whether or not he would return, now was the time to go. If he did come back to find them permanently and satisfactorily located elsewhere under the protection of another Bishop, nothing could be done to disturb them. They had no engagements binding them to Vincennes. As they were now entirely cut off from Ruillé, and as Mother Theodore was a rightfully constituted superior general, she was no longer obligated to seek permission from either Bishop Bouvier or the Ruillé superiors. Keen and experienced though she was, she never permitted herself however to act exclusively upon her own lights.

She too delayed for prayer and counsel, and now she and the harassed councilors who knew what was under discussion must bow in resignation to what they felt for the present was the Will of God. The Bishop's letter written in his own hand reached them on November 3, the eve of the day when Monseigneur de la Hailandière arrived with Father Shawe to bless the village church. After a few words explanatory of his delay in writing, Bishop Bouvier proceeded:

We have read attentively the notes you sent and your very detailed letter. . . . Our hearts are broken,⁵ and we feel for you the deepest concern. But what counsel to give you? That is the difficulty . . . it does not appear practicable to us that you should go to establish yourselves on Sister Mary Cecilia's property some miles

⁵ *navré*.

from the city of Chicago, for what would you do in so remote a situation? Where would you find the money to build, to live, to maintain yourselves? The best procedure undoubtedly is then to try to come to an arrangement the least possible amiss with the Bishop of Vincennes and to remain in his diocese. Men pass away but institutions are lasting.

The Sisters of the original French colony would always be welcome at Ruillé, Sister Olympiade and all the American Sisters of course excepted. "What will become of Sister Olympiade and all the other Sisters received in America?" his Lordship continued. "This demands on your part very serious reflection."⁶ This serious consideration had already occupied the minds of the Community to such a degree that from the first they had practically abandoned any thought of returning to Ruillé.

The Bishop then proceeded to directions regarding their financial obligations to the diocese of Vincennes in case they were compelled to leave. Mother Mary insisted that they were entitled to the money they had brought with them and to the Countess de Marescot's gift, as the amounts were given for the Sisters, not for the diocese. Bishop Bouvier repeated this claim in subsequent letters, but later Bishop de la Hailandière threatened to denounce them to the civil authorities if on leaving they attempted to take the slightest thing.

I am writing again to the Bishop of Vincennes, Bishop Bouvier continued. We shall see what will be the result of this new attempt. . . . You and your companions are associated to the apostolic life. You knew on leaving France that you would have heavy crosses. You did not foresee them all. Say courageously with the Prophet that your heart is prepared for everything, but do not let prudence abandon you. . . . Assure all your Sisters and be assured yourself, my dear daughter, of my deeply paternal sentiments.

J. B., *Bishop of Le Mans*

EPISCOPAL SEE OF LE MANS
Cabinet of the Prelate
September 18, 1844⁷

By the time this letter reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods events in the diocese had succeeded one another rapidly, but in no respect had matters bettered themselves between the Bishop of Vincennes and the Community. When he arrived to bless the Church on November 4 every possible honor was paid him. The Sisters had decorated the interior of the edifice and erected a throne for his Lordship. The Bishop had not answered Mother Theodore's letters, nor at his last visit in September had he consented to see her, though she had called upon him three times at the priests' house, Father Buteux's brick dwelling on the edge of the ravine, built while he was awaiting the Sisters in 1840, which stood on the site of the present chaplain's residence. Mother Theodore's preparatory week of prayer and silence and sacrifice had been devoted to a search before God for some possible solution of their troubles. Now she was resolved to make another attempt to induce the Bishop to help them. This time when she sought an interview, he consented to receive her.

Leaving the poor Thralls house, which for nine years more would serve as their motherhouse, she threaded her way under the grey November

⁶ S.M.W.A.

⁷ S.M.W.A.

sky through the leafless trees, which remained dense all over Saint Mary-of-the-Woods until the 1880's, to the old bridge which crossed the ravine at a point some distance south of the present handsome stone and wrought iron structure. A row of small indigenous cedar trees still growing today may mark the direction of the old walk. Though the season was advanced, the inward fever from which the Foundress had suffered for years and which gave a habitual flush to her countenance, probably caused her to dispense with a wrap. As she walked along with her usual firm light step carrying so bravely her heavy burden of anxiety and sorrow, she was engaged no doubt in a final whispered supplication for light and grace from above in one more of her momentous interviews with the Bishop. Her oft repeated words, "All our graces in this woodland have come from Mary," must have led her before she left the house to the feet of Bertaudière's Madonna.

Did that Heavenly Mother whisper to her the consoling words which she used later to one of her privileged daughters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, "I have been in this place from the beginning. I have formed souls and I will continue to form them?" True, the Queen of Heaven has not, when she chose in her incredible goodness and mercy to descend to earth, selected in the main the haunts of men. The mountain peak at LaSalette in Dauphiny, the niche in the Pyrenees at Lourdes, only yesterday the hollow in the mountain fields of Fatima, and earlier the cliff of Guadalupe in our own America, where she met the pious and untutored Juan Diego, were the spots of her predilection. Only one of these could have been known to Mother Theodore, but her own forest too was a sanctuary of Mary. The Heavenly Mother has never chosen the illustrious or the great in the world's eyes to whom to communicate her secrets but preferably children, a poor little shepherdess, an unlettered Indian. Nor would she now disdain to help a harassed group of religious women almost half of them foreigners in a swamp-girdled forest. The saintly Bruté had chosen their home and named it Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Perhaps by the stony ways of affliction Our Lady was solidifying their Congregation in this very woodland which already they loved so well. The Foundress resigned herself as always to the Will of God.

The interview which was before her could not but be a formidable experience. As we have seen, however, she was always the valiant woman, her heart hardly accessible to fear. Mother Anastasie, who knew her so long and so well, "never saw her excited," but at a later even more serious crisis in their affairs Sister Saint Francis Xavier observed that their Mother's heart was "filled with the saddest presentiments."⁸ Now, however, over and above the graces won by her week-long prayer and vigil, she was summoning to her aid the superhuman courage of a mother struggling for the happiness, even for the lives, of her children. She knelt humbly before His Lordship to beg his blessing. Then she rose, and the two dark-eyed Bretons faced each other. She lifted her glance without flinching to the frowning eyes which in his nephew's words "made everybody quail." They proceeded at once to business. She explained gently the painful circumstances, injurious not only to the Community but also in

⁸ *Life of Mother Theodore*, p. 349.

general to religion and souls which, if they were to continue, would make the Community's remaining longer in the diocese an impossibility. She related it all later to Bishop Bouvier:

Knowing that His Lordship was to come to bless the church at Saint Mary's I thought that I should prepare myself by prayer and retreat to meet him. I was convinced, as were all the Sisters, that this visit would decide our future. At the end of the retreat I received your very good letter on the very eve of the Bishop's arrival . . . I had determined what I proposed to say to Monseigneur. It reduced itself to three sources of misunderstanding which, according to my ideas, would compel us to leave the diocese: first, the impossibility of establishing our congregation here owing to the lack of agreement with His Lordship, this want of understanding having been made public by the Bishop himself; second, being only the administrators of the Community we could not in conscience build on ground which was not ours; third, and the most important, that we could not remain where we were not permitted to follow the sacred engagements contracted with God by our profession as expressed in the Rule. . . .

Hardly had I opened my mouth when the Bishop told me that the Community was his, and it would always remain his; that as I was not satisfied I could depart forthwith if I wished; he added in a very forcible manner as he pointed to our little cabins: "I am the proprietor, spiritual and temporal, of that house; I am going to forbid you to set foot in it again. . . ." Little by little Monseigneur became cooler. He said that if he had not given the ground it was only because I had told him I did not wish to remain in Indiana, that I could sell the property and leave with the money. (To have spoken thus I would have had to be delirious, which I was not). Then the good Bishop said that he loved our Rules, that he had never disregarded them, and so on. He concluded by saying that having the ground or not was the same thing to us, since he was allowing us the use of it; that, moreover, we could not legally own property before being naturalized.⁹

Mother Theodore dismissed this last statement. Many foreigners owned property in the United States at that time.¹⁰ His Lordship had himself been an alien not three years in America at the time of his consecration when he took over the extensive church holdings in Indiana from the Eudist Father Vabret at Vincennes, also an alien, to whom Bishop Bruté had willed them. It was still as an alien that Bishop de la Hailandière had begun and continued his widespread land purchases. The five-year residence has been a naturalization requirement since 1802. Moreover the project of incorporating the Community, which would permit their owning as a corporate body, was then in the hands of lawyer friends in Indianapolis with every prospect of success. The matter, disentangled from the Bishop's excuses and subterfuges, revealed what Mother Theodore had long known, a rooted determination in his mind never to give them what they asked, but, her only weapon, persuasion, she still continued to struggle for the existence of her Community. At last he was touched. He acknowledged it. From New York on his way to France he wrote, "You had come back, come back from so far to your Bishop. I remember perfectly well your last words in my room at Saint Mary's. They were full of peace and consolation to me."¹¹

Mother Theodore must have left the Bishop's presence however with

⁹ Mother Théodore à Mgr. Bouvier, 30 novembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

¹⁰ *Revised Statutes of the State of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1843), p. 414.

¹¹ 30 novembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

a heavy heart. She had failed again. Peace, an intermittent and ephemeral peace, they could have, but only on his terms, no settled or secure existence, no real financial security, no ownership of anything apart from him, and especially no rule but his will of the moment. But these were not the sacred engagements they had vowed to fulfill forever, years before kneeling upon the altar steps in the chapel at Ruillé. They were not even Church law. The Bishop did not at this time ask again the recantation, a demand which was to recur at intervals for the next three years, but the combined circumstances all meant the eventual and inevitable destruction of the Community. No religious body could last under such a regime. Bishop de la Hailandière had almost destroyed it while Mother Theodore was in France. Now she knew that under God, but for her, it was doomed. He left at once after blessing the church as has been told.¹²

A week later he was gone to France. She waited some days longer. Then, one evening after night prayers and the long night office of Matins and Lauds customary at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods till 1903, while the Sisters and novices hurried upstairs to retire before the last bell, which rang at nine-fifteen, Mother Theodore took the candle from her place in the chapel where she had just read the points of the next day's meditation for the Sisters, and went slowly into the shadows of "our room." There sitting at her desk, she drew the ink horn toward her and the sand to dry the pages, and testing her quill pen, she wrote for hours. In these early years in her night vigils she was alone. Later, devoted Sister Ann used to sit on the stairs outside her room to wait for her. Sometimes then she is said to have been a witness to the supernatural manifestations which occurred from time to time during Mother Theodore's later years.

It was again to Bishop Bouvier's unfailing interest and kindness that she was pouring out the anxieties which harassed her day and night. Bishop de la Hailandière would soon be in Europe, and he would be almost sure also to go to Le Mans.

You will perhaps think, my Lord, that our affairs are now in a better state, and it is very painful for me to have to undeceive you. No, we can no longer rely upon the Bishop's word,—that is very clear. His Lordship has his projects and his views. He is not sincere. My heart grieves to tell you this, but if you are not informed, how can you adjust our difficulties with His Lordship? He will make promises to you which he will never fulfill. In dealing with him, everything must be in writing, done in form, and according to Rule. . . .

What I intended in writing it to you was to show you the necessity of settling our affairs with the Bishop of Vincennes, now that he is with you. Our Congregation is your work; you began this undertaking; it is for you to give it the finishing touch. We ask only two things of the Bishop of Vincennes:—that he approve our Rules and give us his ground. On these conditions we will always remain in Indiana. If they continue to be denied us, if Your Lordship cannot obtain these two points, drawn up in legal form (for, I repeat it, verbal promises are nothing), we beseech you to give us permission to establish ourselves in another diocese. It would be better not to have the foundation at all, than to have one which would have no other Rule than the caprices of an undisciplined fancy which will censure tomorrow what it orders today. If it is entirely impossible to come to a satisfactory agreement with the Bishop of Vincennes, we propose to establish ourselves somewhere else in America, for we now no longer think of returning to France. Our Congre-

¹² Chapter XVII.

gation is founded here. The good God, while sending us crosses, has blessed us in a truly extraordinary manner. Since my return from France it is astonishing how much the Congregation has advanced in public esteem. Those who were our avowed enemies now give us their children to rear and pride themselves on protecting our institution. Before our arrival, the newspapers had spoken of the protection accorded us by the Queen, and this had a good effect.

We have paid our debts; we are paying cash for what we buy. This is sufficient to give us . . . what they call respectability; our house is comfortable. . . .

We have twenty-five boarding pupils here; others have been promised us, but we cannot accommodate them. One must be in America to lodge this number of children in so small a house.

Our American Sisters are progressing very well, and they are acquiring a good spirit. They are cold, much less emotional than we are. It seems to me that their virtue is more solid being based on pure faith. They have much generosity in conquering themselves and readily allow themselves to be directed by persons who have their confidence, although they do not give it all at once. They sincerely love our Congregation and are ready to make every kind of sacrifice in order to follow its Rules. Would we have the courage to abandon them? For myself, my very worthy Father, I feel I am in the sincere disposition of sacrificing the remainder of my life for them if you will permit it. If my French Sisters, weary of suffering, wish to return to their country, I shall not object. I will rejoice in their good fortune. They will be happy in our dear home at Ruillé. For myself, whatever may happen, if two of our American Sisters remain together, I will remain here as a third with them.

Shall I abandon these virgins, spouses of Jesus Christ, after having received their vows, and that in this Protestant world that does not believe in virtue, that even denies to the Holy Virgin her most glorious title? No, my Lord; nothing but an order from you or from our Mother could ever make me abandon them. Nevertheless, thus to resign myself to stay, especially in Indiana, is to resolve to suffer a sort of martyrdom which has a great many perils under the guise of charity. It is to condemn oneself nevermore to have any consolation whatsoever. But did we expect that when we came here? No, you recall very well. . . .

I beg of you, my Father, in the name of God do not abandon us; write to us what we must do. One word from you will adjust, will end, all our uncertainty. Try to see our Bishop. He will be in France before my letter; he left fifteen days ago. We had some drawings and notes for you, with some products of our country, some letters for our Mothers and for several other persons, but Monseigneur left without our knowing it.¹³

Bishop de la Hailandière's projected absence, which had been known and discussed at large for months, as were almost all his affairs in the diocese, would certainly, considering his destination and his object, prove to be lengthy. His resignation and his coadjutor, these two major objectives fluctuated in his mind. He planned also to alter, if he could, the unfavorable estimate of his administration current in France. It had been for this purpose that he had so often demanded a signed recantation from the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, something he could show in Europe. His increasing melancholy and the threatening conditions in his diocese, of which the Vicar General, Father Martin, kept him informed, eventually led him to Rome to the feet of Pope Gregory XVI to present his wishes and his troubles.

¹³ Mother Theodore à Mgr. Bouvier, 30 novembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

The Bishop's journey eastward from Vincennes with the unavoidable delays of the times consumed over three weeks. He traveled via Cincinnati and Pittsburgh, growing centers of population where the immense progress of the Catholic religion, made evident in rising Cathedrals of majestic design, superinduced in his mind mournful reflections upon the static village of Vincennes. Even Brownsville, Pennsylvania, with no resident priest, where he was detained for many hours awaiting an east-bound stage, had its handsome Gothic church in stone, suggestive of Pugin. After he reached New York, politics also attracted his attention. "You would hardly guess," he wrote, "what has been done here to win over Bishop Hughes and the Irish through him to the Whig party. Even Clay was involved, but the facts against them loomed like mountains in the eyes of the Catholics."¹⁴

Detained by contrary winds in New York harbor, his ship left only on December 10, but once at sea everything seemed auspicious. His twenty-eight day crossing was uneventful. He met with none of the delays and hardships and perils of Mother Theodore's voyage a year earlier and reached Havre on January 6. He saw his native land again, however, without joy, even with a certain sadness and repugnance. He did not meet his nephew, the seminarian Ernest Audran, who had passed through New Orleans en route to France during Mother Theodore's stay there the previous year, nor Father de Saint-Palais, who was later also in France.

The Bishop's itinerary included Paris, Brittany, several other cities where he had business, and Rome. His first stop was in Paris for two weeks. He then sought out his old home in Brittany, where he expected to spend the rest of the winter. After a long stay in Rennes, he paid visits to his brother Joseph at Saint-Servan, to Angers, and Saint Brieuc, and early in April was back in Paris on his way to Lyons, where he expected to interview officials of the Propagation of the Faith, and to Rome. In mid-June he was in Paris again and at the end of July began a retreat at Rennes. Europe pleased him but little. "I assure you nothing is more tiresome than winter in Paris or Brittany," he wrote to Father Martin, and "when you receive this . . . you will have spring. Here it does not come till April or May." He had sent on Anthony Carius, a subdeacon from Alsace, whom he met in Paris, and had procured in Rome several entire bodies of saints, two of which, Saints Urban and Theodore, now rest beneath the side altars of the convent church at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Leaving Havre on the sailing ship *Oneida* with a group including a priest, a seminarian, a postulant, Mlle. Caroline Vicaire, another Breton from Saint Aubin de Cormier near Rennes, for the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and several domestics, he reached New York on September 22, 1845.

During his stay the affairs of the diocese had occupied him everywhere, in Rome especially his resignation, his coadjutor, and the formation of a society of missionary priests to be at his special service. To his great displeasure the question of his resignation was referred by the Roman authorities to the next Council of Baltimore. A rough draft in his hand-

¹⁴ A Very Rev. A. Martin, 3 décembre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

writing in the Notre Dame archives of a letter from Rennes to an unnamed Cardinal tells of his disappointments at Rome:

The reasons for referring¹⁵ me to the Council that is almost two years away when the slowness with which Rome attends to what the Council sends is considered, are without great value. The precedents are to the contrary. A great number of Bishops have been named outside the Council. Rome would be wrong in renouncing its right on this . . . point. For my part I would see with great regret that I would be treated otherwise than my colleagues in similar circumstances. I have already been treated with some lack of consideration,¹⁶ making me wait nineteen days to obtain an audience with the Holy Father, that through Father Vaur the smallest cleric could obtain in 8 or 10. They must count with surety upon the devotedness of the American Bishops, or they hold them in but little esteem to act thus toward a Bishop who comes two thousand leagues not from curiosity but from duty and who receives to his *viva voce* demands the answer, "We will write to America." Should he go away very much flattered?

And this good Cardinal Franzoni to whom the same demands have been addressed 4 or 5 times without any response yet, who tells me to put my business in writing and then keeps it on his desk without reading it, does he think he has given me much encouragement?

I shall stop. These reflections withdraw me from my object and lead me too far away. My principal affair is still that of a coadjutor, although there are several old and new demands to which I have had no answer.¹⁷

In France he had somewhat better success in conferences with the officials of the Propagation of the Faith at Paris and Lyons and with Père Etienne, superior of the Lazarists in Paris, whom he was still trying to secure for his seminary, with Père Louis de Rennes, head of the Eudists of Saint Gabriel's College in Vincennes, and at Le Mans with Père Moreau, superior general of Father Sorin's group of Brothers of Saint Joseph at Notre Dame.

Ruillé-sur-Loir did not see the Bishop of Vincennes, but some time during his first month in Europe he called twice upon Bishop Bouvier at Le Mans. These two interviews and the ensuing correspondence between the two Bishops had the result of all but depriving the harassed Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods of their last prop and friend, counselor and consoler. Almost at once Bishop Bouvier advised the Bishop of Vincennes to allow the Sisters to follow their Rule and to give them the site of their motherhouse, the identical requests that Mother Theodore had made to him. Thus he learned that it was the Bishop of Le Mans and not, as he had thought, the Superiors at Ruillé, who had been her adviser. Bishop de la Hailandière replied as though he heard it for the first time, that it was absurd to ask a Bishop far from his diocese to approve their Rule. To the second request he answered that the Sisters did not need to own their motherhouse. They could rent it.¹⁸ He also accused the Bishop of Le Mans of exceeding his jurisdiction by giving orders outside his diocese to the Community at Saint Mary's, but Bishop Bouvier had specified distinctly in his letter to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods that after the separation from Ruillé-sur-Loir, he could give only advice, something

¹⁵ *Me renvoyer.*

¹⁶ *legèreté.*

¹⁷ 31 juillet, 1845. N.D.U.A.

¹⁸ A Mgr. Bouvier, 27 février, 1845. Ruillé Archives. Copy by Rev. A. Vanier, C.S.C.

which any priest may give to needy souls who may consult him. John Baptist Bouvier had, however, the heart of the true priest of God, compassionate to every human affliction, and Mother Theodore's distressed plea, "I beg of you, O my Father, in the name of God, do not abandon us," must have rung in his ears.

During all these months she was doubtless watching with daily trepidation the slow and uncertain mails, and early in April she heard from Bishop de la Hailandière from Rennes:

RENNES, 14 Feb., 1845

Madame la Supérieure, I have seen and heard the Bishop of Le Mans, and from his words as from your letter it was easy for me to conclude that if for a year you have been engaged in a way that I blame, a little blame must also fall upon him. He has given you advice that he had neither the right nor the grace to give. No doubt he acted with a good intention, but that is not enough in order to do good. Besides since he received such frequent communications from Saint Mary's by which he was partly guided, it would have become his wisdom to ask something from the Bishop of Vincennes. After all neither you nor he should forget that if I have nothing to do with his diocese, neither has he anything to do with mine. However improper in my opinion was some of the advice he has given you, you would be greatly mistaken if you imagine he approves of your whole conduct. He finds it unbecoming to ask me, a traveler, far from my diocese for a formal approbation of your Constitutions; he declares it absurd for you to leave Vincennes; you could not do so without breaking your vows.

After that you must not take it ill, but attribute it to yourself, if I tell you that the request you make me, relative to your Constitutions, I look upon as a pretext you seek in order to have an occasion of complaint and to break up your relations with the Bishop of Vinc. Why not have asked for that sooner? Is it to a traveler that one acts in this way? And then, is there danger in waiting? To the impropriety you add irony. What you ask me you say is a means of justifying myself of the accusations of which I have been the object on your part and of most of yours. One thing is certain; it is that you have neither the courage to maintain your accusations, nor to retract them. It is true that that is less easy than to write serial stories in the "Universe."

You return to your request only indirectly. You almost seem to understand that before claiming what you have no right to but as a favor, you must at least place yourself in a condition to receive it; but "you will not build, your conscience does not allow you to do so." See what it is to have a timorous conscience! Why is it not equally timorous when there is question of speaking of your Bishop, of impressing your Sisters, of causing yourself to be solicited to leave Vincennes? Your conscience does not allow you to build! But how is it that your conscience does not tell you also that you should not receive the money that was given you to build with? That to keep for yourself what was given to repair, for instance, the disaster of the fire, of which you have made here such an exaggerated account—this is not acting very conscientiously.

But, "you will leave Vincennes; you are solicited to do so *viva voce* and in writing." You repeat this to me three times in your letter, without counting the other ways by which I have learned it. But what is your end in that? To frighten me by your threats? You know me but little. When have you obtained anything of me by threats? Never. On the contrary what have I refused you when you were confiding, simple, and true? Those who have caused you to stray from your first ways have rendered you a bad service.

But, truly, how dare you tell me that advantageous proposals are made to you, while I know that it is you yourself who have begged for them, you who entertain

and exaggerate them. You boast that they are made *viva voce* and in writing, while you might very easily suspect that I know those through whose interposition they are made and that I can say without hesitancy that it would be honorable for you not to have made use of them. Yes, I am aware of this intrigue, and it is painful for me to learn that after so many promises of doing better you still listen to perfidious voices which have been already so fatal to you.

Be frank as you were in the past, speak frankly. Do you really wish to withdraw from the diocese of Vincennes; the gold that you see glittering down yonder, and which has proved to be for others only brass, does it tempt you? How many are you who have been seized with the illusion? Tell me. I will not keep them by force.—Console yourself and have a little patience. If the Almighty continues to give me life and health, I will go to St. Mary's in a few months, and I will dispense those who have a right to be dispensed. But wait a little while. Remember that until that time what you would do in opposition to that which binds you to Vincennes and to its Bishop would even be contrary to your vows, and would merit from your Bishop a severe judgment and Canonical censure.

But if, notwithstanding appearances, these things are far from your thoughts, if you are attached to Vincennes, re-enter into the path from which they have caused you to stray, and recall to mind that when God poured His blessings upon you, it was when you were simple with your Bishop, and when you listened to his voice in preference to that of others, that He lavished them upon you. It was also then that you were more peaceful and recollected—all went well when you had confidence in your Bishop. It has been otherwise only from the moment that you took advice elsewhere. It would be again as it was if you were the same. But to expect by threats to force this poor Bishop to anything of which they render themselves unworthy by that very fact of threatening they deceive themselves wilfully.

I have nothing to tell you about postulants. The conditions that you lay down for their admission dispenses me from occupying myself about them. One would say you are afraid I would bring you some.

As to what you tell me about M. Kundek's establishment, I leave to you your compliment; I do not accept it. Keep the merit of it yourself.

My respects and blessing to those among your Sisters who still respect their Bishop and superior and are faithful to him.

I have the honor to be with respect, and notwithstanding all, with friendship.

CEL., Bp. of Vinc.¹⁹

Of what heartaches and sleepless nights the above letter was the cause must be left to the imagination. Mother Theodore did not at that time attempt to answer its bristling misrepresentations, but the parts of the letter which referred to Bishop Bouvier were an almost overwhelming blow.

One sorrow only was lacking to me, she wrote to him a little later. It has just been brought to me by a letter from the Bishop of Vincennes, which tells me that you are deeply displeased with me especially for having asked His Lordship while he was away to approve our Rules or to give us others. He adds that you regard our idea of leaving St. Mary's as an absurdity. . . . The only penance I could not bear would be indifference from you towards our Congregation of America, of which you are not only the founder and father but also the protector and the only support. You are, after God, our sole consolation in our sorrows, doubts, and perplexities. Our first thought turns toward you, and on confiding our anxieties to your paternal heart we are already comforted. One word from you, more than that, the hope even of a letter from you, Father, softens for us the trials which it has

¹⁹ Sister Mary Eudoxie's translation, Book 3, p. 166. S.M.W.A.

pleased the Lord to send us in such great number in this country. What would happen if this help should fail us in the midst of the perils which surround us?²⁰

While Bishop de la Hailandière was still in Europe, the diocese was governed by the Vicar General, Very Reverend Augustine Martin, who was himself to leave it before the passage of another year. To him the Bishop had written about the same time:

As for the Sisters I have seen that the requests they have been making of me have been written to the Bishop of Le Mans. Perhaps they have even acted somewhat on his advice. He was nevertheless the first to declare that it was absurd to think of leaving the diocese. They have no right to do so. They would be false to their vows.²¹

To this last statement Bishop Bouvier opposed a positive correction, I never told you that the Mother could not leave without being false to her vows.²²

Mother Theodore too later reminded Bishop de la Hailandière that the Sisters of Providence had made no vow to remain in the diocese.

The Community at Saint Mary's did not hear from Bishop Bouvier for weeks. Then at last in May came a letter from him with no reference to the absurdity of their leaving the diocese, but containing on the contrary the long-hoped-for permission to depart:

If absolutely you cannot remain, you know that Ruillé is disposed to receive again the Sisters it has given . . . nor would we object if at your own risk you should go to establish yourselves elsewhere. When you left us so courageously for America, you did not foresee the trials which awaited you there. Everything however concurs to the greater good of those who love God, and the sorrows more than the joys, for the elect are moulded in the winepress of affliction. Be careful then not to sink into discouragement. Try rather to rise superior to the trials through which you have been obliged to pass. This is the characteristic of solidly virtuous souls.²³

This letter was not all, however, of a nature to encourage the Community. It contained on the contrary several points calculated to cause intense grief:

The Bishop of Vincennes has seen, he says, a letter from your Superior General, treating him as a young Bishop who would necessarily make many mistakes. He thinks that my advice has influenced you greatly in your manner of acting toward him, and he has told me flatly that he recognizes no right on my part to give *ex officio* counsels and much less orders to the Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods . . . you see, my dear Sister, that I can do nothing further for you.²⁴

This was the worst possible news to the Community, but after the first dark tumult of fear and dread, came the courage and the will to accept even this heavy and bitter cross. Mother Theodore in particular knew the compassionate heart of Bishop Bouvier, and both now and later she persistently refused to believe that he would forsake them.

In the meantime at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods winter had declared it-

²⁰ 25 avril, 1845. S.M.W.A.

²¹ Rennes, 10 février, 1845. S.M.W.A.

²² A Bishop de la Hailandière, 31 juillet, 1845. Ruillé Archives.

²³ Mgr. Bouvier à Mother Theodore, jour de Pâques, 1845. S.M.W.A.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

self unequivocally with the first flakes of snow in mid-December. Christmas weather was however so mild that the Sisters could go out without wraps. December has never been a month of extreme cold at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Even in the early years the near-zero temperature came only in the two months after Christmas. Father Corbe spent a week in Vincennes after the Christmas festivities were over, and during his absence Father Lalumiere crossed the river to say Mass for the Community.

Father Corbe had hardly returned on January 18, 1845, when another of Mother Theodore's terrible illnesses came upon her. During the last two weeks of January she grew steadily worse. The last day of the month a fire broke out in the convent during the night. The Sister cook had inadvertently left hot coals in a barrel under the porch, but the flames grew very slowly, and the furious barking of Mother Theodore's little dog Taillard roused all the Sisters. The convent bell pealing through the night called the workmen, and all working together succeeded in extinguishing the blaze before any serious damage had been done, although the porch was entirely destroyed, and the flames had already burnt the window of the adjoining scullery. Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote to France details of that anxious night:

During Mother Theodore's long illness a part of our building took fire about midnight. Our Sisters were awakened by the brightness of the flames, which were already penetrating their dormitory. They rushed downstairs uttering cries that awakened me in the rear of the garret, where I was sleeping, but from which I could not see the fire. On hearing their plaintive cries, I thought Mother must be in her agony, and I wished to drag myself to her to receive her last blessing. I could not walk. Suddenly the moans redouble; the bell rings. O my God, she is dead.

But at that moment I was courageous. God gave me grace to offer Him with a firm resignation this immense sacrifice, the last I could accomplish in this land of exile. I wished to comfort our poor Sisters by weeping with them, when one, rushing in out of breath, exclaimed: "The house is on fire!" "Be blessed!" I cried, clasping her in my arms, "the house is on fire; our dear Mother is not dead, then?" I ran to the chapel, and there, all alone, I sobbed for joy, whilst the others tried to quench the flames, which happily did but little damage. God watched over us, for some minutes later it would have been impossible to have saved the house, as it is a frame building. Bless Him especially for having preserved our Mother, a thousand times more precious to our Community than any other good! To understand all she is worth you should have suffered for sixty days, every instant fearing to lose her.²⁵

The fright however aggravated Mother Theodore's already alarming temperature, and as she was growing daily worse, Doctor Baty was written to ask his advice. During the night before the feast of the Purification she suffered a severe attack which took away almost all hope of preserving her life. She herself thought her last hour had come. She asked Sister Saint Francis to recite the prayers for the agonizing, and at Mass time she begged Sister Mary Cecilia to stay with her. During the day she felt somewhat better. Her fever, however, which had been intermittent became continuous and rose again alarmingly, and she was racked by pain. Father Corbe wrote for Doctor Baty to come.

²⁵ *An Apostolic Woman*, pp. 262-263.

Prayer now seemed their only hope. The annual Forty Hours Devotion was in progress during the week of February 5, and the Sisters at home and on mission united in prayer and penance for their stricken Mother's recovery. During forty days she could retain nothing but a little water, and from hour to hour her life seemed to hang by a thread. Leeches from Louisville bought at the price of privations by the Sisters at Madison were received on February 11, and next morning Doctor Baty arrived. This intelligent and skillful young physician had attended the Foundress before and knew the reserve strength which had tided her over previous extremities. He was therefore always hopeful. After a week at her bedside he returned to Vincennes on February 19, and the patient continued to follow his prescriptions though without notable relief. A few days later Sister Vincent Ferrer sent from Vincennes a box of oranges, a rare delicacy in those days, hoping that they might refresh the sufferer. On February 22, Father Corbe wrote to his friend Father Martin at Vincennes that every human assistance seemed powerless in her favor and that Heaven alone could save her.

Eventually the tide turned. Only at last on the fortieth day of her illness however could she take a little broth. Fervent and continued prayer went on for her at the motherhouse and in all the establishments. The first week of March she was sufficiently improved to walk up and down a little in her room and to sit in her chair a few hours each day. During her terrible illness of their first winter in America she had sought the powerful aid of the Mother of God by a vow. Now at Father Corbe's suggestion she turned to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, promising to replace with a lamp the simple tumbler in which their poverty had thus far kept the light before the Blessed Sacrament in the sanctuary of the convent chapel. This was early in March, but not till the feast of the Annunciation was she able to assist at Mass, over two months from the January day when she was taken ill. "Several times" only, as the diary records, was she permitted to receive Holy Communion, a great privation for her loving heart, but the Jansenistic practices so characteristic of France at that era died out very slowly, not indeed entirely till the blessed time of Pope Pius X.

Convalescence seemed now established. A short drive in the mild afternoon weather of early spring did not prove too fatiguing. It was thus that wisely she tested her returning strength after each of her illnesses. A business trip to Terre Haute the next day, March 26, was more, however, than her slowly recovered powers could endure, and she returned completely exhausted. She was definitely on the mend, however, and three days later another similar trip for "many provisions for which we pay cash" is noted in the diary. She had resumed it herself now from Sister Saint Francis Xavier's hands with the grateful words which recur so often under her pen, "It is ever to Mary that we owe all the favors which Heaven grants us." This long and dangerous malady, like most of the serious illnesses which marked her career in America, was aggravated if not entirely caused by anxiety over the difficulties which beset the Community. For these were the shadowed years, the years of sorrow, "*les années de nos épreuves*," in the expressive phrase with which Mother Theodore always referred to them later when the blessed sunshine of

God's peace had begun to shine again upon the Community. She was just able to be up when the letter already quoted from Bishop de la Hailandière from Rennes reached her. Some months later she describes its effect upon her to Mother Mary:

I received that letter when hardly convalescent after a very grave illness which kept me for sixty-five days at the gates of death, and from which probably I shall never fully recover. I have so little virtue, resignation, and confidence that this letter almost thrust me back into my former state. For three nights I could not close my eyes.²⁶

Each of these serious and prolonged illnesses however sapped her strength still more deeply, and the Sisters marvelled at the courage and gaiety which amid so many afflictions never forsook her. As long as she was able to be up at all, not time nor inclination nor health had any power over her when duty called. "When we become tepid, I believe God sends an illness to Mother," wrote Sister Saint Francis, "to reanimate our fervor. What promises we make Him then! Happily the good Father knows that mothers are necessary to children." The Sisters felt that their Mother's preservation especially from shipwreck on the way from France and from her seventy-day illness in New Orleans was an evident token of the will of God that their work in America, beset as it was with strange crosses, would eventually arrive at days of prosperity and peace. The continual anxiety of the Community as to Mother Theodore's health, and even her precious life, which during weeks and even months every year seemed about to fail, is revealed in one of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's letters to her family:

Mother maintains that I have said for her: "To suffer and never die"; and there is some truth in this, for I know her sufferings will be recompensed, and that her death would be a great calamity to us.

We often need to make acts of confidence, for if the stroke arrives unexpectedly we are ready to faint.²⁷

Another spring was upon them with its multifarious duties. Mr. Edward Audran, one of the Bishop's nephews, a consumptive seminarian, who had been cared for during fourteen months at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, left for Vincennes early in March to die a few months later. His brother Ernest, who had come to America with Father Martin's party in 1839, completed his theological studies at Vincennes, was ordained by his uncle in 1846 and lived to an advanced age in the diocese, spending twenty-two years as pastor of the Vincennes Cathedral and later of Saint Augustine Church in Jeffersonville from 1868 till his death in 1902. Father Martin, the Vicar General, administrator of the diocese in the Bishop's absence, wrote that Monseigneur de la Hailandière was now known to have arrived in France. Mother Theodore was just able to be up a few hours each day when Father Martin came with three of his seminarians to spend Easter with "our good Father,"²⁸ as Father Corbe is almost invariably called in the diary. On all of these comings and goings small packets of letters were exchanged with the Sisters on mission and with friends. Captain Edward

²⁶ 12 juillet, 1845. S.M.W.A.

²⁷ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 262.

²⁸ *Notre bon Père*.

Doran, Mrs. Baty's brother, commander of the brig *Dolphin* in the United States Navy, who had spent many months guarding the west coast of Africa against slavers, was now on furlough visiting his family in Vincennes and brought a parcel and letters from France when he came to see his sister Anna who was a pupil at the academy. Father Michael Clarke from Lafayette, Father Kundek from Jasper, and Father Timothy Mullen from Scipio were also visitors. Father Mullen was leaving the diocese, and within a year Father Shawe also quitted Vincennes to join the faculty at Notre Dame and some months later transfer to the Detroit diocese.

Despite the difficulties of travel there was a considerable amount of visiting to and fro, and the priests of the diocese en route upon their missionary journeys stopped frequently to spend the night and say Mass for the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, as Father Corbe at this time was often absent in Vincennes. Among the clergy who were at Saint Mary's during these months were Father de Saint-Palais, accompanied by William Doyle, Sister Philomene's and Sister Lucy's brother, still a seminarian, Father Lalumiere who said Sunday Mass for the Community in Father Corbe's absence, Father William Chartier, who was returning to his native Canada, and Father Badin, the aged *proto sacerdos* of the United States, whom the Sisters had met in 1840 on their way to Vincennes. As Father Corbe was again absent, the veteran missionary preached to the Community several times during his visit. Father Lalumiere was always glad to ride across the river from Terre Haute to say Mass or hear confessions or officiate at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Later Brother Marie Joseph on his way from Madison to Notre Dame stopped for a brief visit. Somewhat earlier Father Sorin "still fervent as a Seraph" had stopped "on his way to Vincennes to make his peace with His Lordship."²⁰

The work on the farm required Mother Theodore's attention as soon as she was able to be up. This year the acreage planted was increased, and a greater variety began to appear in the plantings. In general the pioneers contented themselves with simple fare, and the farmers made little effort to introduce varieties of fruits and vegetables, something which could have been done very easily with the excellent soil at their command. Ploughing for potatoes began at the end of March, and at the same time Mother Theodore records the planting of kidney beans and the sowing of "all sorts of vegetables and flower seeds in the garden." The corn was not planted till a month later, but the year's yield was disappointing both in quality and quantity. The clover was ready to cut at the end of June. Repairs were often in order. The well at the academy was unsatisfactory, and it had to be emptied and cleaned and eventually a new one dug. Their little bridge too was broken by a falling tree uprooted during a storm and was satisfactorily mended only two weeks later.

All these details required Mother Theodore's constant supervision, but early in April, as soon as she was able to travel, she left Saint Mary's with Sister Therese as her companion for a visitation of the missions. This was her first visit to Madison since she had accompanied the foundresses in September, and she returned home pleased and encouraged with the ex-

²⁰ Mother Theodore à Mère Marie, 28 octobre, 1844. S.M.W.A.

cellent work going on in the schools. Madison, Vincennes, and Jasper were now solidly established in surroundings where the number of Catholics gave promise of continued growth. The diminutive mission of Saint Peter's was to struggle along a little longer, but it was the last to be undertaken in remote rural localities too sparsely settled to make a school possible. All told, the Sisters of Providence had now some two hundred and fifty children under their care, whose "simplicity and docility" were the consolation of their teachers. The Sisters devoted themselves every year to preparing the children for their First Communion, which was received with admirable respect and devotion. The largest number was at Madison, where despite sporadic outbursts of renewed intolerance, the bigotry, which still at intervals so intimidated some of the Sisters, was slowly dying out. The training given the children was reflected in the families. Father Kundek in particular told Mother Theodore that he remarked a great change in his parish through the influence of the Sisters.

Toward the end of July the missionary Sisters began to arrive for the retreat, those from Saint Peter's first, then Vincennes and Jasper, and lastly Madison. During this week Père Michel could be spared from the farm, and he went for a visit to his friends and fellow countrymen at the Picquet settlement at Sainte Marie accompanied by his young son Hubert, who lived with Father Corbe during these years. By arrangement with the Vicar General, saintly Father Deydier from Evansville was to give the retreat again this year. As he wished to return to his parish for its patronal feast of the Assumption, the exercises opened on the evening of August 3 at six o'clock with the *Veni Creator* and a conference followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The atmosphere of profound silence and recollection during the succeeding days consoled the heart of the Foundress. On the morning of August tenth, Father Corbe assisted by Father Deydier officiated at the ceremonies during which with the greatest fervor and recollection, Sister Mary Magdalen, Sister Gabriella, Sister Catherine, Sister Ann, and Sister Martha were professed, and five postulants received the religious habit, Sister Anastasie, Sister Caroline, Sister Mary Therese, Sister Joachim, and Sister Lawrence.

The names of all these Sisters have already appeared in these pages, except those of Sister Caroline and Sister Joachim. Ann O'Dell was of Irish stock from the old colony of Catholic Kentuckians at Mount Pleasant in Martin County, Indiana, where Father Delaune had built a church in 1841. She entered the novitiate in July, 1843, and was given the name of Sister Caroline. Her first mission was Madison, but the next year she was one of the foundresses of Saint Augustine's, Fort Wayne, where she spent many years as a music teacher and was greatly loved. She was present at the golden jubilee of the school in 1896. The end of her life was spent in retirement at the motherhouse, and she died in 1905, after sixty-two years of religious life. Sister Joachim, Jeanne Bodin, was born in Brittany in 1815, and as no opportunity offered for her to fulfill her desire to become a religious in France, she accepted an invitation from Bishop de la Hailandière to come to Vincennes to superintend the household of his new seminary. She made the journey from France with the Reverend Julian Benoit in 1843, at the same time as Mlle. Bernard. Her fine qualities attracted his attention, and he recommended her very highly to Mother Theodore,

who received her into the novitiate in July, 1844. Mother Mary had known her in France, and Mother Theodore wrote:

Since what you have said of *la petite Bodin*, we have decided to receive her into the novitiate. She is truly a charming person, devout, open, always the same. She is loved by the whole Community, and although she is rather old,³⁰ she seems to have great facility. Sister Saint Francis, Sister Mary Cecilia, as well as Sister Saint Vincent, besought me to give her some hours for study every day. I did so, and in a few months not having a moment for study outside of class time, she has surpassed Sister Mary Therese. . . . We have given to this good child the name of St. Joachim, a name for which we have great devotion.³¹

In 1851 when the diocesan seminary was closed and the old Saint Gabriel's College building in Vincennes converted into an orphanage for boys, Sister Joachim was named superior and spent twenty-five years in the devoted service of the orphans. Her last years amid great infirmities patiently borne were passed as an assistant in the lingerie at the motherhouse in the humble employment of mending clothes. Her prudence, her obedience, humility, and charity were a constant source of edification till her holy death in 1901.

After the retreat adieux were in order. The zealous pastor of Evansville left at once after the ceremonies of the close of the retreat, but Mother Theodore detained the missionary Sisters for a few days relaxation. "We keep our Sisters to take a little recreation with us, and we go for a walk in our woods," she wrote in the diary.

We have been happy to unite again with our poor missionary Sisters, wrote Sister Saint Francis to the superiors at Ruillé. I had not seen Sister Saint Vincent for more than two years. I felt myself still the possessor of my French heart. We drew closer the bonds of charity which absence and the tempests of this country might have somewhat relaxed. Our strength will be in our union.³²

On August 20 Sister Marie Joseph and Sister Mary Margaret, en route to Jasper, and Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer's group for Vincennes, made up of Sister Gabriella, Sister Mary Magdalen, and Sister Seraphine were driven by Logan. Sister Saint Liguori, Sister Mary Celestia, Sister Catherine, and Sister Caroline left on the twenty-fourth after Vespers for Madison, and a few days later the two Saint Peter's Sisters, Sister Austin (Augustine) and Sister Agnes, set out for Vincennes accompanied by Mother Theodore, who was taking Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Angelina to consult Doctor Baty. The former had been visibly fading away under the moral sufferings of their position, and the health of both Sisters was giving Mother Theodore considerable concern. A week under Doctor Baty's care, however, and the remedies he prescribed enabled them to return much improved to Saint Mary's.

The school year had closed with unusual success just before the retreat. The Reverend Michael Clarke came from Lafayette for the public examination of the academy pupils with very satisfactory results. On September 17 classes were resumed, and Father Corbe celebrated the Mass of the Holy Ghost at the church, where the Blessed Sacrament had now been reserved for some months. Eighteen pupils were present, and

³⁰ Twenty-nine years.

³¹ 12 juillet, 1845. S.M.W.A.

³² 20 août, 1844. S.M.W.A.

the *Veni Creator* was sung, and all the Sisters communicated to ask the blessing of God upon Sisters and children.

Father Corbe had now been three years at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and no one during this entire period from his appointment as Ecclesiastical Superior in July, 1844, to the Bishop's departure in December, 1847, was closer to the Community or more intimately concerned in all its trials. Sister Saint Francis Xavier recorded in one of her letters to France:

The good God has given us a few days of truce by placing us under the authority of Mr. Corbe, who is a very tranquil character. We have bought very dearly these days of repose, for the crisis must have been severe to oblige Monseigneur to resign. For us, it is humiliating indeed after three or four years sojourn in a diocese to be rejected by the Bishop, but there are humiliations which are salutary. . . . If you know anywhere a lover of opprobrium, he could come here and make a fortune.³³

Elsewhere she says that Father Corbe's devotion to their Rule was a great consolation to the Sisters. Whenever any measure of importance was under consideration his first inquiry was whether the Rule covered it, and if so, he wished no further discussion. He was consulted regarding the Sisters admitted to profession and reception in August, and it was upon his advice that the Particular Council was increased by adding to it Sister Saint Liguori, Sister Marie Joseph, and Sister Mary Cecilia after Sister Basilide's retirement.

On his appointment as chaplain in 1842 he had known only a few of the Sisters, and in 1844 when the Bishop named him Ecclesiastical Superior over a Community which was already in public disgrace, his lot seemed to him unfortunate indeed. The Bishop had probably not really expected to do more than threaten to appoint him and would never have done so, if he could have obtained the signed recantation which he hoped to take with him to France to reestablish his damaged reputation. Father Corbe's powers thus were in reality very limited, and by that time his prestige as Monseigneur's best friend was already a thing of the past. On the paper on which the Bishop had listed his reasons for refusing to remain "*supérieur direct*" of the Sisters any longer, a line along the edge records his attitude toward their chaplain, "Has not the Mother been the cause of my losing Mr. Corbe's confidence?"³⁴ Not the Mother, but Monseigneur himself had already alienated this pious, upright, and self-sacrificing priest. About this time the Bishop wrote him a long letter detailing his ideas regarding the government of the Community, beginning with some references to their personal relations:

18 July, 1844. It must be confessed, my dear Friend, that your letters become rather singular. I did not believe you to have either a woman's heart or imagination. I should never have thought that after the special marks of confidence and interest that I have never ceased to give you, I should be obliged on every circumstance to offer you new proofs. You are even weighing my style; it is not the same as it was. I am then displeased, and why displeased? Because you advised the suppression of the boarding school at Vincennes. But I did not know the course you had taken, and I did not think that you should have meddled with it. Displeased for what then? Truly is it reasonable to torment me in this way? Have I not enough

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ N.D.U.A.

to bear from other quarters? Is it any more reasonable to judge Mr. Martin? You ascribe to him things that he did not say. Tittle-tattling? Have you come so far as to believe in these women's tales?³⁵

Father Corbe's isolation and the problems of administration which were forced upon him, especially after he was named Ecclesiastical Superior, were very hard for one of his peace-loving disposition and accentuated the need he felt for a prudent and sympathetic friend. His temperament had a pronounced strain of timidity and hesitancy, and his decisions were often made for him by those in whom he had confidence. Gradually Father Martin, four years older than he, more experienced, like himself a Breton from Rennes, and endowed with the same scientific and scholarly tastes, won his lasting confidence and affection. They differed markedly in certain aspects. Father Corbe's mind and tastes were really somewhat more artistic than scientific. His skill with the brush and pencil and his interest in photography have already been mentioned,³⁶ but he lacked the unerring accuracy and attention to detail of the true scientist. The two priests had much in common however, and in Father Corbe's affection Father Martin eventually came to occupy the relation of a loved and trusted older brother.

Whatever you may say, I often think of you, and although you sent me a few lines seemingly with regret, yet they gave me great pleasure relieving for a moment the interminable peace of my solitude. Yes, I have peace, but an interior peace which is far from happiness. . . . I am enjoying in advance the few days you have promised to come and spend with me. We will rove through the woods in search of plants and flowers, we will sing and laugh, but that is still far away. In the meantime be kind enough to write to me, telling me about Vincennes and Francisville, and I will try to answer.³⁷

All during Father Martin's stay in Vincennes till 1846 several of the seminarians spent their vacations at Saint Mary's. Father Martin often accompanied them at Easter and in August and remained a few days with his friend. Father Corbe was glad to have the students and was always urging Father Martin to send them or bring them. "I have spoken to the Sisters about it several times."³⁸ The two Doyles came each year till William the elder was ordained in 1847 by Bishop Bazin, and others also came by threes and fives. Then four or five times a year Father Corbe escaped from the anxieties and uncertainties of his position and left "this poor Saint Mary's and all its troubles"³⁹ for visits longer or shorter to Vincennes. In 1844 he spent five weeks there at one time staying on after the ecclesiastical retreat.

Many of these trips were made to consult Father Martin at periods of special stress either in the Community affairs or in his own difficulties, for these years were for him a time of great personal uncertainty and suffering. His position as superior and adviser of the persecuted Community brought him into conflicts with the Bishop which eventually made his life intolerable. In all these circumstances Father Martin was his con-

³⁵ S. Mary Eudoxie's translation, Book 3, p. 159. S.M.W.A.

³⁶ His box of colors is preserved in the museum.

³⁷ 9 janvier, 1844. S.M.W.A.

³⁸ 1 mars, 1845. S.M.W.A.

³⁹ 12 novembre, 1845. S.M.W.A.

fidant and counselor. Very few of his letters are dated, and the postmark supplies this omission only in part as it was not then customary to register the year.

Mother Theodore has returned to Saint Mary's but this time greatly discouraged, and it cannot be otherwise. She will probably go away, and then what will be left at Saint Mary's? A troop of poor innocents who are no more capable of forming a Community than I of taking a bite from the moon. As for me, it no longer concerns me greatly. I have written to Monseigneur a letter which must terminate everything between us. It may have been an act of desperation, but in any case it is done, and I preferred to do it now in order that he may not be able to accuse me of retiring at a time when he could hardly replace me. He can easily bring an additional priest with him. I have not done this without sorrow as I found that I was more attached to Indiana than I had suspected, but now that my mind is made up as to the future, I feel much more calm. I have only the more eagerness for my geological researches in which I have been rather fortunate since my return from Vincennes. I have found some very curious specimens, geodes composed of substances which I had never seen. I thought several times of sending you some of them by the stage having no other occasion.⁴⁰

A few weeks later he wrote again:

As to my ideas of migration and concerning the Community I have many things to say to you which I cannot undertake to tell you now. This is, however, the time when I wish and need to see you most. Many plans are passing through my head. I will speak to you of them as to a friend, and I will follow the advice you will have the goodness to give me. I shall have a good little provision of mineralogy to bring you. Amid our cares it will give us some slight diversion . . . I commend myself very specially to your prayers, for I am going through one of the great trials of my life. I will tell you how, if you have not already sensed it. Be assured that I am and will remain for life. Your entirely devoted friend, J. Corbe.⁴¹

At this time Father Corbe's intention was to retire to his original diocese of Rennes in France. His engagement with Bishop Bruté had been for ten years only, and the term of that period was approaching. "Truly," he wrote, "it costs me to leave a diocese for which I have sacrificed my best years, but I can see no other possible course." His final decision was not taken however, and he relied upon Father Martin to direct him.

If I am not to see you soon, I will ask you to tell me as a good friend where I should direct my steps. For that purpose I will tell you some reasons known to me alone which engage me to prefer some dioceses to others. We will see each other soon, and despite my determination to go, I will leave only when I hear from you again, and you tell me when will be the best time to leave.⁴²

Affairs were at this stage when Bishop de la Hailandière returned from France to the diocese. The Community learned of his arrival on October 16, and three days later Father Corbe and Father Lalumière set out together for Vincennes.

⁴⁰ 27 mai [1845], S.M.W.A.

⁴¹ Pmk., June 12 [1845]. S.M.W.A.

⁴² Pmk., October 9 [1845]. S.M.W.A.

CHAPTER XIX

FURTHER EFFORTS TO ESCAPE FROM INDIANA

"When trials oppress us, let us raise
our eyes to Heaven. There is our
Father, our hope, our treasure."

MOTHER THEODORE

IT WAS as superior of the Community that Father Corbe had gone to Vincennes to seek an interview with Bishop de la Hailandière on his return from Europe. Father Corbe's own affairs were to some extent settled inasmuch as he had informed His Lordship by letter, as has been noted, of his intention to leave the diocese. As to his ultimate destination, he expected to follow Father Martin's advice. The plans of the Community to seek another home outside the Vincennes diocese were still in abeyance. Bishop Bouvier had indeed given his permission for them to go if their situation made it impossible to do otherwise, but in view of the increasing success of the boarding school at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and the rapid development and expansion of the Community, he wished them to make every effort to remain. One single circumstance, the fervor and earnestness, the profound silence and spirit of recollection of the Community during the annual retreats, had impressed deeply the different priests who had an opportunity to observe them. From this circumstance alone they drew the confidence that God would not abandon the Community. "Father Deydier has preached the retreat admirably as he did last year," wrote Father Corbe.¹ "The Sisters will profit by it, I hope, as they have been truly edifying during the entire time. I am confident that the good God will sustain and continue to bless this Community already so deeply tried."

In encouraging Mother Theodore to make every effort to remain, Bishop Bouvier may have felt also that the repeated rumors of Bishop de la Hailandière's resignation pointed toward his early retirement from Vincennes. In any case the Sisters continued to remain in their forest home hoping and praying, but without taking the immediate measures to find a new location, which might have been expected.

We desire earnestly to be able to remain in Indiana, wrote Mother Theodore to Bishop Bouvier. We are disposed to make every sacrifice we conscientiously can make in order to remain here, but we all feel that it is impossible to stay. . . .

We will make one more effort, Monseigneur. If it does not succeed, we will leave, but I have interiorly the confidence that the good God wants us in America. He has already done so much for us. If He wished to destroy us, would He send us so many crosses, that precious Cross which has always been the seal of His works? I cannot believe it.²

Most of the Indiana priests who had left the diocese had gone without the Bishop's permission. The ties of priests to their diocese in pioneer times were very loose. "Of all the priests who are rushing to the South,

¹ A Very Rev. A. Martin, 12 août, 1845. S.M.W.A.

² 10 juin, 1845. S.M.W.A.

one only, Mr. Kundek, has had my permission and that for three weeks," wrote Bishop de la Hailandière to Bishop Blanc.³ Most of these priests had gone to Louisiana, and Bishop de la Hailandière in his April letter to Mother Theodore from Rennes had taken it for granted that the Sisters too would be attracted by the comparative peace of Catholic New Orleans. That diocese had in fact been open to them owing to the kindness of Bishop Blanc since Mother Theodore's stay there in 1844. Neither then nor later however could she ever resolve to expose her Sisters to the periodical scourges which racked the South and which passing by the natives and old residents, fastened with deadly effect upon strangers. Her friends there, the charitable Ursulines and their chaplain Abbé Perché, had not forgotten her however, and in August she had received a long letter from Father Perché urging them to abandon ungrateful Indiana and as members of the Ursuline order join Mother Theodore's former hostess in New Orleans, Mother Seraphine, who was opening a new foundation in Galveston during the ensuing winter. These kind friends were sending her a barrel of wine, but the molasses and *sirop de batteries* had fermented in the heat of the Louisiana summer and would come later.

The Bishop of Milwaukee also had proposed to the Community to establish themselves in his diocese during the previous year, but Mother Theodore had not at that time received Bishop Bouvier's approval. The first practical and definite arrangement for entering another diocese came from one of the priests who visited Saint Mary-of-the-Woods during the summer of 1845. Most of those who were leaving the diocese came to say farewell to the Sisters. Father Mullen arrived in January, followed later by Father Charles Opperman, a well educated German whom Father Deydier had met in New York and induced to come to Vincennes. Ordained in 1841 by Bishop de la Hailandière, he was now planning to affiliate with the diocese of New Orleans. In June came Father Chartier, the French Canadian priest who had accompanied the Sisters west in 1840, who was now on his way back to his former diocese in Canada.

He offered to plead their cause with the Bishop of Detroit, Most Reverend Peter Paul Lefevre, and after his arrival there he wrote at once the result of his interview. The Bishop already had an elementary school in the episcopal city taught by Sisters, but this would be no obstacle as "your establishment would be destined for the higher branches of education," wrote Father Chartier. "He feels how useful an institution of the calibre of yours, which has been tried out in this country, would be to the numerous Catholics of his episcopal city, many of whom are rich and fashionable and are obliged to send their young ladies to a distance for their education." The Bishop owned several desirable locations in the city, notably one adjacent to the Cathedral, which Father Chartier inspected, and His Lordship offered also Monroe, where the Redemptorists were settled and where the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart were founded some years later. Father Chartier also suggested Sandwich across the Canadian border in Ontario, where the Jesuits were in charge, though only tentatively as he knew that the Community felt that their work was in the United States and emigration to Canada would be only a last resort.

³ 29 février, 1844. N.D.U.A.

Neither at Monroe however nor at Sandwich would there be a place for Father Corbe.

During a second interview next day Bishop Lefevre was a little less encouraging. He referred to their ex-novice Sister Aloysia, of whom he had heard, and hoped the Sisters of Providence would not endeavor to add to their Community by enticing away other Sisters as they had done in her case. Father Chartier however was completely informed on the matter and assured the Bishop that "neither directly nor indirectly" had the Sisters been involved in Sister Aloysia's leaving the Sisters of Charity, but "Bishop de la Hailandière had coaxed this young Sister away because she showed talent and was an American."⁴

In August Father Chartier wrote again, "Some of the principal citizens of Mount Clements [sic] have come to see me to learn whether I have had news from you. They are still very desirous of having you." Bishop Lefevre had taken no positive steps however as he understood that if a satisfactory arrangement could be reached with the Bishop of Vincennes the Community would remain in Indiana. "I fear the Bishop of Vincennes might come to know of my letter," he said to Father Chartier, "and he would not pardon me for encouraging the emigration of his Sisters, especially as he considered it so great a crime on my part to have given refuge to Father Sorin's Sisters in my diocese." He offered a parish in Detroit to Father Corbe, however, and if "excessively prudent is sincerely willing" continued Father Chartier, "and if the worst comes to the worst, I feel you may write to him with the assurance of a favorable response."⁵

"The summer passed away peacefully in our forest," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier in the *Annals*,⁶ "although sinister letters caused us to fear that a storm was brewing on the other side of the ocean." While the newly chosen councilors were still at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, after fervent and continued prayer, they met to canvass their situation thoroughly and decide upon the best procedure for their future. It was agreed unanimously not to permit their Constitutions to be changed. The next question was whether they would consent to follow the kind of government the Bishop had in view, that is, the dispersal of the Sisters in small groups detached from the motherhouse, and entirely under the control of the missionary priests. As they knew that the Bishop was forbidden by Canon Law thus to change their organization without their consent, the decision upon this point also was unanimous and negative. A letter to His Lordship was therefore drawn up, discussed, and approved, a final plea for the approbation of the Rule, and in case it was not forthcoming, a last declaration of the Community's intention to seek elsewhere the peace and security which the diocese of Vincennes could not afford. This document was carefully put aside to be used only in the event of absolute impossibility of remaining in Indiana.

A second measure was taken at this time by the councilors without Mother Theodore's knowledge. They expected the Bishop to insist upon another election similar to the one held while Mother Theodore was in France in 1843, as he had said at that time that she was elected for three

⁴ Reverend William Chartier à Mother Theodore, 21 juin, 1845. S.M.W.A.

⁵ A Mother Theodore, 21 août, 1845. S.M.W.A.

⁶ Book 1, p. 357. Sister Mary Eudoxie's translation.

years. After consulting Father Deydier, they wrote a joint letter to Bishop Bouvier to ask his advice under the circumstances.

We resolved that the Sister Councilors should profit by the time of the retreat to write in concert to the Bishop of Le Mans to tell us plainly whether we ought to oppose the election of a Superior General which we foresaw would be required by Monseigneur on his return.

Fearing to compromise our Mother and our Reverend Superior, wrote Sister Saint Francis in the Annals, we wrote our letter without their knowledge. Good Father Deydier had approved our prudence and even proposed that the Bishop of Le Mans should address his answer to Evansville. Monseigneur accepted the offer and enclosed his reply in a letter to Father Deydier.⁷

It reached them late in the autumn and reiterated their freedom to retain their Rule unmodified and to return to Ruillé or to settle in another diocese in America. The Bishop of Le Mans repeated that he could give only counsels however as the American Sisters were no longer under his jurisdiction. "The sentiments which you express in your letter of August 10 touch me to the very core of my heart. I am always deeply interested in you, and if I could, I would help you. It would be a true happiness for me to do so." The Bishop in this letter expressed however the unwillingness of Ruillé to be a party to their leaving Vincennes and his own desire that if possible they should remain.

I do not retract the permission I have given to Mother Theodore to settle with her companions in another diocese, in case she must leave that of Vincennes; but she would do it at her own risk and peril, the house at Ruillé not wishing to be a party to any such arrangement. How much I desire, my very dear Sisters, that all might be for the best at Vincennes, and that you might continue in that diocese the good that you have so happily begun.⁸

Mother Theodore was deeply disappointed at the failure of Bishop Bouvier's efforts to regulate their affairs with the Bishop of Vincennes.

I had always hoped that our venerated Father would be able to adjust all our difficulties with Mgr. de la Hailandière. He was our last hope. Imagine how painful it was for me to have to renounce it. It was to give up entirely the expectation of ever coming to terms with His Lordship. We must then leave Indiana, but we could not even think seriously of doing so without incurring excommunication. That is not a little thing. . . .

We are going to do all that depends on us, dear Mother, to remain here if it is possible. Such is your desire; it is also the desire of the Bishop of Le Mans. Your desires will always be orders for us. But it is possible that we shall not even be able to try, for if Monseigneur intends sending away Sister Saint Francis and me, it is very probable that the other Sisters will not let us go alone. Well, we shall see what Providence will decide. I would go with pleasure if I saw our work established. I feel that I am no longer fit for anything. My last illness has not only taken away my strength, but it has also sapped all my courage. I am just like a *poule mouillée* and a pitiful *douillette*,⁹ and I am extremely susceptible physically. The heat here this year has been suffocating. In the middle of the day I can hardly stir, and in the evening if I stay only two minutes in the damp night air which pierces to the bone, I will cough for fifteen days. In a word I am nothing more

⁷ Book I, p. 357.

⁸ *J. and L.*, pp. 186-187.

⁹ A delicate and pathetic personage and a pitiful mollicoddle.

than a *patraque*. So, the little time that remains to me, I would like to spend in retirement. I am afraid to undertake anything elsewhere, as beginnings offer so many difficulties in this country. Moreover, I love our Saint Mary's. We are doing good here. There are twenty-six boarding pupils, who give us much satisfaction. After a short time with us they are not recognizable for what they were when they came to us.¹⁰

Each time that she wrote to France, she gave definite details on the status of the Community:

Our missions are doing well. We have visited all this summer, Sister St. Vincent and I, and we are pleased. Sister Liguori has twenty-seven Protestants in her school who were like little wild animals last year, and worse. They are now infinitely better, and with their parents, have become advocates of the Catholic religion, so horribly calumniated in that city of Madison. But what gives us the most satisfaction is a class of forty-eight or fifty little Catholics who are admirably pious.

Our other houses also are doing much good; but not one is self-supporting. We have to maintain the Sisters, pay their expenses of coming to the retreat, and often have to give them money. In spite of all this, our affairs are in a good state, and although we have paid for Monseigneur, since he left for France, 2,860 francs, a debt he incurred for his church, and which he charges to us, we have been able to finish paying our own debts and we still have a few dollars left.¹¹

During all this time Mother Mary at Ruillé, who had seen Bishop de la Hailandière's letters during his stay in France to the Bishop of Le Mans, was very fearful for the future of the American Community. "We have noted Mgr. de Vincennes's letter," she wrote to Bishop Bouvier, "which is amazing for the errors it contains and for the tone with which they are presented. He shows a profoundly irritated mind,¹² and we fear that Sister Theodore will become the victim of this irritation." Where Bishop Bouvier had failed, Ruillé could not hope to intervene successfully. "What can we do?" continued Mother Mary. "Nothing, absolutely nothing."¹³

During all this period of nearly eleven months while the Bishop of Vincennes was absent from the diocese Father Martin as Vicar General was in regular correspondence with His Lordship. Their relations appeared still to be upon an equable footing, and as yet there was no exterior sign of the rift, which led Father Martin five months after the Bishop's return to leave Indiana permanently. In the interval his letters gave a detailed account of matters in the diocese which came to his knowledge. From Father Corbe he knew of the most intimate affairs of the Community and of the possibility of their departure. He rejoiced with them when Bishop Bouvier's letter arrived with the permission for them to go, and he informed Bishop de la Hailandière of this fact which was calculated to vex him greatly. Mother Theodore regretted this. "I would have preferred that His Lordship should learn it here," she wrote.¹⁴ The Bishop learned also from Father Martin of the unrest among the priests which

¹⁰ A Mère Marie, 12 juillet, 1845. S.M.W.A.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *esprit monté tout à fait.*

¹³ 9 septembre, 1845. S.M.W.A.

¹⁴ A Mère Marie, 12 juillet, 1845. S.M.W.A.

was on the increase during these months and was evident in the number forsaking the diocese. "It is impossible to foresee not only what will become of our Congregation but also of the entire diocese of Vincennes," wrote Mother Theodore about this time.

The Eudists were reported in November, 1844, to be leaving Vincennes within fifteen days to open a college on a site worth eighty thousand dollars offered by the Bishop of Mobile. Father Bellier was at St. Mary's in September, and leaving Father Chassé as president of Saint Gabriel's, he spent the following months in Mobile. He was back again in Vincennes however in March, 1846. Before that time Father Buteux had already sailed for France, but the college, though choked with debt, struggled on a little longer. To us at the present day their indebtedness does not seem overwhelming, eight thousand dollars,¹⁵ but things bore a different aspect in 1845, with the scarcity of money, especially to the thrifty French ecclesiastics with their innate horror of debt. The Eudists made a tentative effort in September, 1845, however to locate a novitiate and boys' school at Sainte Marie, Illinois, where Joseph Picquet as Gérant of the Colonie des Frères offered two hundred and fifty acres of prairie land and one hundred and fifty of forest, a full farm equipment of domestic animals, etc., and "the house known as Hartrich's."¹⁶

The Bishop was returning more melancholy than ever, yet otherwise unchanged, aware that the disorder and discontent in the diocese had grown alarmingly, but temperamentally unable to see that the responsibility was his. "If things continue thus," he wrote from Rennes, "in a short time we shall not have a single priest in the parishes not anyone even to poor Angélique¹⁷ who will not have left."¹⁸ "What will become of the diocese without priests?" wrote Sister Saint Liguori to Mother Theodore. "His ardent and lofty spirit however could not well check himself."¹⁹ "I am not at all convinced that I was wrong," he wrote to Father Martin, "I shall go back, my heart as heavy as when I left . . . I do not flatter myself with a brighter future."²⁰ I have no reason to think that I could do better in the future, and I have still to learn what I should have done to prevent what has happened."²¹

The Bishop was returning also without a coadjutor. "I am far from renouncing the idea of a coadjutor. This does not mean, however, that I am bringing you one." He never thought apparently of the hardworking priest who had faced for eleven months the difficulties and discouragement rife at Vincennes, although he acknowledged Father Martin's ability, which was recognized by a mitre in the South some years after he left Vincennes. "What shall I offer you for all you have done for God, for the diocese and for me? Peace and retreat, that cannot be. . . . A little less work? Oh, yes, certainly, a little momentary repose? Yes, doubtless,

¹⁵ Bishop de la Hailandière à Father Martin, Paris, 3 avril, 1845.

¹⁶ Two signed copies of this agreement are in the Vincennes Cathedral Archives.

¹⁷ Angélique Nielle in service at the Bishop's house in Vincennes.

¹⁸ A Rev. A. Martin, Rennes, 27 juillet, 1845. S.M.W.A.

¹⁹ Rev. Ernest Audran in Alerding, *History of Vincennes Diocese*, p. 178.

²⁰ 18 juin, 1845. S.M.W.A.

²¹ 26 juillet, 1845. S.M.W.A.

and with it thanks, good wishes, prayers.”²² The Bishop had sent three names to Rome as his choices for a coadjutor in June, 1844: Martin John Spalding, later Archbishop of Baltimore, then pastor at Bardstown, Kentucky; Charles J. White, pastor of the Cathedral at Baltimore, and George Goodwine, priest of the diocese of Boston. He had the consent of the two Kentucky Bishops, Flaget and David for Father Spalding and preferred him.²³ Some months earlier he had written to Bishop Blanc his desire for “a coadjutor or at least a friend. It is saying enough that thus far I have none here.”²⁴ In view of his wish to retire from the diocese no active measures concerning a coadjutor had been taken up in Rome.

Father Corbe returned from the visit to Vincennes mentioned in the last chapter, toward the end of October after a week's absence, accompanied by the new postulant, Caroline Vicaire from France afterwards known as Sister Maria. His interviews with Bishop de la Hailandière had made him hopeful for an arrangement which would render it possible for the Community to remain in Indiana. He encouraged Mother Theodore to seize the opportunity to make the final effort she had promised Bishop Bouvier. These difficult and delicate negotiations weighed heavily upon Father Corbe.

I am tormented day and night, he wrote to Father Martin, by I know not what demon which urges me to forsake St. Mary's and all its difficulties . . . I expect from the goodness of God that all will be arranged. Your boys are preparing with joy to go back. They have all been good children, and I am pleased with them.

The seminarians had relieved the loneliness of his isolated situation. They served his Mass and helped with the work of the farm. They went hunting with him, and inspired by Father Martin's scientific tastes, the little group ranged the woods and streams as far as Coal Creek in one direction and the Wabash in another in search of shells and geological and botanical specimens.

Good Mother Theodore, continued Father Corbe's letter, has decided to go to Vincennes with Sister Lucie to see His Lordship. Aid her with your counsels, I beg of you, and your influence. Encourage her. The good God will inspire you with means of being useful to her. I tell you again and I write it, that she alone is capable of directing the Community. If she is sent away or forced to go by Monseigneur I will resign.²⁵

Several reasons made the trip apropos at this time. Sister Lucy had been ill since the previous summer, and Mother Theodore wished to have her consult Dr. Baty. The seminarians were returning to Vincennes, thus affording the two Sisters an opportunity of making the trip. In pioneer times transportation was a major problem, and the wagon never went anywhere from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods without its space being utilized to the utmost, both going and coming. The river was usually too low in the summer and autumn to permit steamboats to come up as far as Terre Haute, and at this season the Sisters ordinarily used the stage, or the wagon, with Logan as driver. He was now almost grown, and his wages

²² 18 juin, 1845. S.M.W.A.

²³ A Bishop Blanc, 12 juin, 1844. S.M.W.A.

²⁴ 29 février, 1844. S.M.W.A.

²⁵ novembre, 1845. S.M.W.A.

had advanced to six dollars a month, exclusive of board, clothes, and any other care he might need. Father Corbe had been graciously received by Monseigneur, and he felt that a similar welcome awaited Mother Theodore. She left Saint Mary's on November 6 and was back again on the twelfth. Allowing for the usual two-day trip she could thus spend some forty-eight hours in Vincennes and have time to call upon the Bishop once or twice. He was very gracious and gave her his picture taken in France, probably the original of the 8 x 10 photograph still preserved in the Museum, and long kept by Mother Theodore above the mantel in her room.

The Foundress hurried back as her presence was always needed at the motherhouse. About this time she first tried the new ferry, which she found very poor and the way to it from the convent very hilly. The work on the farm required her constant supervision. The large bridge had broken in two, and one of the cows was almost strangled with a huge turnip. This circumstance illustrates one of the great disadvantages of allowing the domestic animals to forage for themselves all during the summer and autumn, and even winter, as was so generally done in pioneer times. Though the large wild animals had by this time been exterminated, and the poisonous snakes, blue racers and rattle snakes, had been devoured by the pigs, which ranged the forest and fattened on the mast, domestic animals were very poorly cared for. Horses and cows were much tamer than in Europe, but the lack of shelter and of warm food during the severe weather kept them thin, reduced the amount of milk, and caused many deaths from overeating when they got better food or when the fresh grass of spring appeared in the fields.

The severe winter season had its own needs and requirements. The piercing cold, so hard upon the French Sisters and especially upon Mother Theodore, had begun earlier than usual at the end of November. The academy was constantly increasing and additional supplies were needed. The Community wagon placed upon runners was sent over the snow to the old Indiana Blast Furnace, maintained by Hugh and Alexander Stewart, Mrs. Friel's brothers, on Brouillette's Creek some ten miles northwest of Saint Mary's, for iron beds, and six were brought back. They were of course for the pupils, as beds were more or less of a luxury in the Community all during the early years. At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as late as the 1860's the novices and postulants were still sleeping on the floor. Mother Mary Cleophas used to relate that in her first years in the Community there was only one bed in the Novitiate, which was the perquisite of the latest arrival. She had the luxury of occupying it one night only when another postulant arrived to claim it. The pioneers never concerned themselves for sleeping accommodations but stretched out on the floor anywhere wrapped in a blanket or a buffalo robe.

No single facet of the cross however was lacking to the Community during these years. One difficulty which recurred repeatedly after Mother Theodore's return from France and the consequent severance of the Community's dependence upon the Bishop was a financial one connected, among other matters, with the parish church. When the Community at this time became self-supporting, the Bishop began to look back upon the sums he had previously expended for them as a debt and to wish to be reimbursed, although the Propagation of the Faith was still contributing

yearly specified sums ample for the maintenance of the Community. If in the beginning, the Sisters could have been located in Terre Haute or in any center of population, they could probably have supported themselves from the start. His Lordship gave varying estimates of the amount of money he had spent upon Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. To Bishop Bouvier he said a hundred thousand francs,²⁶ to Madame Le Fer a hundred and forty thousand.²⁷

There was now no lack of churches in the vicinity of Saint Mary's. Among the favors which the Bishop had conferred upon the Community, he often included the fact that he had "built them a church," although for their own services they had no need of a church, their convent chapel amply supplying every requirement. Father Buteux's original parish of 1837 was now however supplied with three substantial and roomy brick churches. Saint Aloysius' at the North Arm, built by the people themselves, was the only one serving a considerable number of Catholics, the Kentucky colony. Saint Joseph's in Terre Haute was judged by Bishop de la Hailandière himself to be far in excess of the needs of the place, and Father Lalumiere when appointed pastor of Terre Haute in December, 1842, found "hardly any Catholics, very few families."²⁸ At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods also the number of Catholics hardly counted at first anyone beyond the families of the three Thralls brothers, Mrs. Friel's family, and a few others. The Bishop then depended upon the Community to finish and maintain the still incomplete edifice.

When he departed for France in November, 1844, the church was still far from finished, and the workmen living at the farmhouse and engaged in the work on the church were in charge of Father Corbe. No money was left for their wages, and these expenses and all bills for materials needed were presented to Mother Theodore. Fourteen hundred francs for wages, traveling expenses and provisions for the workmen, a thousand francs for lime and other materials, thirteen hundred to the glazier, who had been engaged to fit the church windows with glass, these items appear at various times on the accounts during the Bishop's absence. The Community was to be assessed another thousand francs yearly for pew rent, though they frequented the church only on Sundays. They had given up for its adornment the gifts received for their convent chapel from friends and relatives in France, and they supplied it with linens and lighting. They swept and cleaned the church and did the church laundry, all this gladly as a service to the Eucharistic King, but they were still struggling. What money remained to Mother Theodore's account in France must be carefully husbanded to erect the two wings without which the academy could function no longer. The missions had to be supported by the motherhouse as the people, everywhere poor, were in many cases Europeans unaccustomed to contribute to the maintenance of religion or schools. "You see," wrote Mother Theodore, "that we would have to be millionaires to meet all this." A consignment of apple trees reached them about this time, which His Lordship had ordered, and Mother had to find

²⁶ \$20,000.

²⁷ \$28,000.

²⁸ St. Joseph's Church Record.

the money somewhere to pay the bill. Simply and humbly she bowed her head to the inevitable.

Her visit to Vincennes in November, 1845, had at first seemed an answer to the prayers and supplications for help addressed to Heaven during the entire year of the Bishop's absence in France. His Lordship had been gracious and paternal. When she told him simply the state in which the Community was, a painful condition of uncertainty, awaiting and hoping everything from him, even before she could finish her explanations, all was promised, all was granted. He loved their Rule. He had always loved it and wished it observed in his diocese. She asked him for a written statement of his good intentions toward the Community, which she could show to them on her return, and he dictated a few lines. When he had finished, she saw that she held in her hands only a vague and meaningless scrap of paper. When to the words which she had written at his dictation, "It is easy for me to see that we have been mistaken in thinking and saying that His Lordship would not give us the property nor allow us to observe our Rules," she begged him to add the corollary which would give them force and meaning, *since he is willing to do both*, the Bishop refused. She wrote to him at once on her return to Saint Mary's, again beseeching him to give them what they were asking, their simple elemental rights under every aspect of law and justice. He answered by a vague letter of recrimination ignoring her requests and renewing his demand for a retraction of the old statements written to France in 1843. Later in a letter he reverts to the "writing you call a paper," the questions and answers brought by Mother Theodore from France, of which he had demanded a "correct and certified copy."

The Community was now beginning the last phase of its long and painful purgation. From now on, for nineteen months until Bishop de la Hailandière learned of the appointment of his successor in June, 1847, and in reality till he left Vincennes the following December, there was no rest or respite in the way of sorrow and humiliation to which they were condemned. His Lordship now repeated his last and bitterest threat. If they left, he would excommunicate them. Those who knew him well knew that this was no idle threat. One of his first acts upon returning from France as Bishop in 1839 was to place Saint Mary's Church in Chicago under an interdict. His strictures upon his priests as we have seen, were not less severe. "I have deprived the Grand Vicaire of his faculties. It has done him good," he wrote to Bishop Blanc in 1844.²⁹ As he insisted that Mother Theodore alone was responsible for the state of affairs in the Community, the letter drafted and approved by the six councilors during the preceding August was now brought forth and sent to each of them for her final approbation and signature. Father Corbe at least, in his quality of Ecclesiastical Superior, saw and approved this document. Whether it was shown to Father Deydier, who was present at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as retreat master at the time it was drawn up, or to Father Martin or any other of the Indiana priests, cannot now be ascertained. It contained however nothing new. It was a renewed supplication for the written approval of their Rule,

²⁹ 29 février, 1844. S.M.W.A.

which is absolutely necessary in order to establish our existence as a Religious Congregation. . . . Without your permission we cannot follow certain requirements of our Rule in your diocese. We know this well, and far from withdrawing from the authority of our Chief Pastor, as submissive daughters of the Holy Roman Church, it is from him that we wish to receive all. Our Constitutions make this a duty for us. It is clear that without the Bishop's protection our house cannot exist. Under his paternal wing we must find a refuge against our enemies. If this resource is closed against us, if this support is wanting to us, we shall infallibly perish. What will it be if instead of a father we find in our Bishop a severe censor of our most innocent actions, one who would seem pleased to bring among us a spirit of disunion? . . .

It would be painful for us to be obliged to leave a diocese which is ours by nature and by adoption, and where we have already received so many graces, nevertheless whatever it may cost us, we believe ourselves obliged to leave, and that very soon, if Your Lordship disregards our petition.

Such is the invariable and unanimous resolution of those who would esteem it a happiness to call themselves your respectful daughters, but who will ever be, come what may, My Lord, the most humble and grateful servants of Your Lordship,

SR. MARIE JOSEPH

SR. MARY CECILIA

SR. AUGUSTIN

SR. ST. VINCENT

SR. M. LIGUORI

SR. F. XAVIER.

St. Mary-of-the-Woods, 19 August, 1845.

Sometime late in November, 1845, when the letter was sent out to the councilors for their further consideration and signatures, its appearance was the signal for consternation throughout the Community. It revealed the truth that their affairs were indeed at the lowest ebb. Uncertainty as to the future of the Community rendered anxiety acute in all the houses. "What will become of us?" were the harrowing words on every lip. To the French Sisters, far from home and kindred in a strange land, their position was painful in the extreme. But to the three former Sisters of Charity, who at the Bishop's persuasion had left the security of a well established religious family to join their fortunes to a group now under impending condemnation as a rebellious Community, the situation was filled with acutest suffering. From the young American Sisters and the novices everything distressful in these harrowing times was concealed, but to the older Sisters the meaning of the events of these tragic months as they gradually reached the missions was unmistakable.

As was his custom the Bishop replied at once to the councilors' letter, but without referring in any way to their requests or to the subject matter of their communication, thus again *ipso facto* refusing to approve the Rule. By this refusal, more far reaching in its effect probably than he intended or wished, he automatically removed the Community from his jurisdiction and returned them to that of their general superiors in France. Their position was indeed anomalous. The identical Rule which had been formally praised by the Pope, in Europe only two years earlier, could not in America secure even episcopal approbation without which they could not exist as a religious Congregation. Bishop de la Hailandière's many letters of this period are each more painful than the last:

To Sisters F. Xavier and M. Cecilia,
Vinc., 14 Dec., 1845.

I received your letter; it is far from answering mine. I repeat the request made in my first for the writing which you call a paper. The Bishop of Vincennes . . . declares that Miss Le Fer less than anyone has a right to the pretension she affects in her letter. I protest against the word superiors in speaking of some persons in France. I declare as Bishop that I cannot have any communication with her as a religious as long as she recognizes as her superiors persons anywhere else than in my diocese.⁸⁰

There was now nothing to do but to take up again the arrangements to leave the diocese which had been dropped in the hope of some possible agreement with the Bishop of Vincennes. As Mother Theodore had written to him, their last hope was now destroyed by this final deception. Nothing could be achieved by further correspondence. They had exhausted every effort, prayer, conciliation, sacrifice. On December 18 she wrote for the first time in person to the Most Reverend Peter Paul Lefevre, Bishop of Detroit. Father Corbe also as Community Superior wrote at the same time:

St. Mary's of the Woods, Dec. 18, 1845.

To the Bishop of Detroit:

My Lord, before taking the liberty of writing to you about the important affairs with which we are engaged, we wished to consult our superiors in France, His Lordship, the Bishop of Le Mans and our Reverend Mother, to beg their permission to settle somewhere else than in Indiana. We have obtained it. We desired also to see Mgr. the Bishop of Vincennes, and to correspond with him. We have done so; and although our affairs are not entirely terminated, the nature of our situation leaves hardly any doubt that we shall quit Terre Haute shortly. Persuaded of this, we have cast our eyes upon your diocese, drawn both by the reputation of your prudence and zeal, also by the thought that we could fulfill more perfectly the end of our holy vocation, which being entirely that of charity and devotedness, would find more occasion for its exercise than in a diocese in the East.⁸¹

Father Chartier had already ascertained that Bishop Lefevre would make no difficulty about approving the Rule and permitting the Sisters to follow it. In sketching their financial situation, an important detail in a new foundation, Mother Theodore gave general information:

If we remained here, we would be rather well fixed. We have no debts; but having spent our money in founding our house, our pecuniary resources would be very small for a new establishment; but the Council of the Propagation of the Faith, being acquainted with our work and appreciating it, would not undoubtedly refuse to continue its assistance.⁸²

Christmas of 1845 was an anxious time. Fear that without their knowledge Mother Theodore would be sent suddenly away from the diocese oppressed the hearts of the missionary Sisters. Her circular letter written to the Community at this time reflects the depths of apprehension and sorrow into which their hearts were plunged.

Christmas Eve finds my heart throbbing with pain and anxiety; yet, as I think of you all, my dear Sisters, and behold your faithfulness in the observance of our

⁸⁰ S.M.W.A.

⁸¹ Book 3, p. 190. Sister Mary Eudoxie's translation.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

of the previous year only in the violence and haste of its onset. To add to their distress Dr. Baty was away from Vincennes and could not be reached. Harassed though they were by the most painful apprehensions, yet the Sisters' faith and confidence rose heroically to meet this new trial. They had learned, Sister Saint Francis tells us, by the experience of the past years that God had placed the ransom of their Mother in their hands, and that they could save her by their prayers. As the weary days of illness crept by, prayers and sacrifices mounted unremittingly to heaven begging of God the cherished life of the sufferer.

Illness among the pupils of the academy and death added to the anxieties of these painful days. Little Harriet Williams, Mrs. Susan Williams's younger daughter, was taken seriously ill of scarlet fever. She seemed however to be improving, when the physician called by her mother from Terre Haute to attend her gave her an overdose of morphine. To the consternation of her mother and the Sisters round her bed, the child grew at once rapidly worse and died during the night of February 16, before there was even time to call Father Corbe to administer the last Sacraments. The utmost care was necessary to prevent the Foundress, herself in an almost dying state, from learning of the child's death. They left two Sisters to watch at her bedside and went in haste to the church where Father Lalumiere assisted by Father Corbe was performing the funeral service. Sister Saint Francis Xavier paints the scene in the Annals:

The last prayers were being said at the child's grave when we suddenly perceived Sister Martha running pale and trembling. "Father, Father, come, Mother is dying." She could hardly speak. God only knows the anguish of our souls at this news. We dragged ourselves, almost choked with grief to the chapel, and there before our sole Refuge, our only Saviour, we awaited with sighs and tears the moment when they would come to tell us, "She is still living."

"Pray, oh, let us pray," whispered poor Sister Olympiade. "Oh, let us have confidence." Our good Father Corbe never left our Mother who seemed more like a dead person than a living being and yet who was destined to live to aid us again in our days of trial. Three entire days she passed in this sad condition. Hope alone in God sustained us. We persevered in prayer, and God, our Good Father, had pity on us. Oh, how could He do otherwise when He saw His poor children offering Him to save their Mother every sacrifice He could desire: humiliations, prayers, penances, letters burned, beads given away, the dearest objects generously sacrificed to buy back our Mother? So many acts of virtue, could they remain without reward!

During these days of trial we had an increase of crosses. *La petite* Walters, one of our pupils, was attacked by scarlatina and her father, mother, and grandmother came to take possession of our little clothesroom which is today Saint Anne's Chapel. We were also obliged to hide this untoward circumstance from our Mother for fear of augmenting her illness. What precautions that the doctor when coming and going might not be seen by her. Mother was also still ignorant of Harriet's death. At last these days of perplexity, of illness, and painful concealments passed away. The feast of our Father Saint Joseph was celebrated with great solemnity, preceded by public prayers, which we have since continued each year during the month of March, as it was to Saint Joseph we had recourse during the latter period of Mother's illness.³⁰

Father Corbe adds a few details to the story of the harrowing days

³⁰ Annals, pp. 361-362.

JAMES MARIE MAURICE LANDES D'AUSSAC
DE SAINT-PALAIS

1811-1877

Bishop of Vincennes, 1849-1877

For forty-one years he lived the life of
an Indiana missionary.

*From an Early Portrait at
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods*



CÉLESTIN-RENÉ-LAURENT GUYNEMER
DE LA HAILANDIÈRE

1798-1882

Bishop of Vincennes, 1839-1847

To the end of his long life his most treasured title was "Former Bishop of Vincennes."

*From a Portrait in the
Old Cathedral Rectory, Vincennes*





From an Early Daguerreotype at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods

JOHN CORBE

1805-1872

For thirty years he was chaplain and for twenty-eight years
ecclesiastical superior of the Sisters of Providence.



Drawn by Sister Georgiana from a sketch by Father Corbe

SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS IN 1854

The Village Church, Saint Mary's Institute, the Chaplain's Residence, and the
New Providence Convent.

which followed little Harriet's burial, that never to be forgotten Wednesday, February 18, 1846. This devoted Father never left Mother Theodore's bedside all that long day, reciting the prayers for the dying again and again. And still though apparently in her last agony, sustained by some trickle of vitality, the Foundress lived. For three long days her life hung thus in the balance,

without the least sign of improvement or the slightest gleam of hope. At last on Saturday the violence of the fever seemed to abate a little, yesterday a little more, and today there are some symptoms of a real and permanent improvement. The good God, I think, has yielded to the prayers and tears of his children prostrate by turns day and night before the Blessed Sacrament. At last I believe that once more God will give them back their Mother, their only hope.³⁹

in the perilous days through which the Community was passing. These were the blessed days of Forty Hours Devotion carried out each year with all possible solemnity.

During all the early years there was much sickness among the pupils, but the illness of "little Walters," a child who scarcely appeared in the school when she was attacked by scarlatina, proved to be very brief. Her mother withdrew her as soon as she was able to travel, and her name does not even appear on the roster of pupils for 1846. During these years it was customary to remove the sick children to Providence to be cared for, partly for the purpose of isolating them from the other pupils, a considerable difficulty in the crowded conditions of those years, and also to give them better care. It was probably at Providence that Harriet Williams died, "one of our best little boarders," as Father Corbe said,⁴⁰ and this was why it was so formidable a task to conceal everything from Mother Theodore.

At last however the burning grip of the fever which had held her for so many weeks was loosed, and she could look once more upon the anxious faces round her bed with the old loving motherly glance. Brought back again she was, she knew, from the verge of the tomb by the prayers and sacrifices of her daughters. She knew and acknowledged it so simply, "They are very tenderly attached to me." It seemed that as long as Sister Francis Xavier lived to inspire the Sisters to heroic deeds of sacrifice and penance by her sublime faith and love that Mother Theodore could not die. And in reality God reserved for her, for them both, ten more years of zealous labor for Indiana, and Mother Theodore died then only after Sister Saint Francis had been nearly four months in her grave.

As March progressed and the bitter winter cold was succeeded by the fresh spring air, the patient continued to gain strength. Every day showed some slight improvement, and she was now able to go out in the sunshine for a short time upon the porch. She was told at last of little Harriet's death. On the third of March she could drive out in the spring afternoon as far as Terre Haute in the carriage. On March 8 she was able to receive Holy Communion with the Sisters in the chapel for the first time, and gradually from that time on with her accustomed energy she resumed her daily duties and took up again her neglected correspondence.

³⁹ A Very Rev. Aug. Martin, 23 février [pmk.], 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

These days of cruel anxiety for the Community had been a period not less harrowing for their superior. To his uneasiness as to the future of the Community if Mother Theodore were taken away were added his own personal griefs. He continued to confide in his good friend Father Martin: "I am ready and determined. Yes, I am leaving Indiana. If the Sisters go, I will follow them, and it will be to the North. If they arrange to remain in Indiana, then I do not know to what mission I shall attach myself." He was hoping to induce Father Martin to join him and the Community in the projected migration.

How happy Mother Theodore was to learn of your desire to come! I told her of it for I knew that fact alone would do her more good than the best of medicines. Tears of Joy came to her eyes, and she charged me to recommend her to your prayers and to tell you how deeply she shares your troubles and your sorrows. . . . Pray, oh, pray for us all that we may escape from this distress.⁴¹

These words reveal the decision which was now rapidly taking form in Father Martin's mind also.

I am hoping, wrote Father Corbe again, that for the sake of your dear boys you will still have patience and courage a while longer, but I am very uneasy as to the decision which circumstances will force you to take.⁴²

I have been putting off my trip to Vincennes from week to week and even from day to day. . . . I would hardly have courage for it after what His Lordship has written to me, exhausting against me the vocabulary of abuse. One or two defects added to what he has written to me would give a complete portrait of the most criminal, the wickedest of men. I put off answering him only at the entreaties of the poor children of Saint Mary's, for my letter would be followed a few days later by my departure.⁴³

Only convalescent still as she was, Mother Theodore had to take up again the painful burden of anxiety as to the destiny of the Community. Nothing was settled regarding their escape from Indiana, and as yet in her enfeebled condition she could not assume the labors and hardships of a new foundation. Bishop Lefevre's offer to the Community and their Reverend Superior still stood open, but the status of the Community was now materially changed by the act of incorporation. They could now legally own property and function as a corporate body. As Bishop de la Hailandière had demanded this charter as an essential condition to his giving the deed of the site of the motherhouse to the Community, it was deemed prudent to make one more appeal to him. The letter was sent early in March for their consideration to the councilors who were not at the motherhouse, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer at Vincennes, Sister Marie Joseph at Jasper, Sister Saint Liguori at Madison, and Sister Augustine at Saint Peter's. Father Corbe approved the letter, and Father Martin also read it. Father Corbe tells us the result:

The Bishop's reply was in his own manner by reproaches and a demand for reparation. Thus his answer is not final but is restrained as also is his demand for reparation, and shows his fear of losing the Community and his desire of coming to terms. Only he does not know how to go about it. If he yields, he does not wish to seem to do so. In spite of his moderation, there are among the apologies de-

⁴¹ 23 février, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁴² n. d. [janvier, 1846]. S.M.W.A.

⁴³ 27 janvier, 1846. S.M.W.A.

manded some which the Sisters say they cannot in conscience give. After all they seem more determined than ever to leave, no matter what. Thus I see no other end to this miserable perplexity than emigration. I will not influence them either to go or to stay. Truly, however, I think they would do better to leave, even though he grants their requests, for after that, will he not find a thousand ways to molest them? Then, too, if their Mother, still so weak, should be lost to them, what would become of the Community with such a guide! Finally I desire greatly to see the *dénouement* which will come, I hope, this week. After that I will think of myself.⁴⁴

The Bishop besides his threat of excommunication now demanded one hundred and fifty thousand francs (\$30,000) as payment for his land ⁴⁵ if the Community left the diocese. Matters continued to remain thus undecided for all these harrowing months.

They were now, however, to lose another friend and adviser. Father Martin was leaving the diocese. This was a cruel blow to Father Corbe, although he had been aware of its imminence for over a month.

Your letter, he wrote on February 3, has given me more pain than you could know. As you might suspect, I could not sleep the entire night and spent the next day with head and body fatigued. . . . What will become of the poor diocese of Vincennes? Oh, if Monseigneur Bruté could come back only for a moment, what grief, what pain, if he were capable of suffering, he would experience! . . . I deeply regret not having induced these poor children of Saint Mary's to accept the first offer they received. All would then be finished now.⁴⁶

On Saint Joseph's day, Father Martin arrived to say farewell. He had severed all ties with the diocese of Vincennes and was now on his way to France. Mother Theodore in the diary does not refer to his reasons for this step, but Sister Saint Francis sets down in the Annals a full account of his visit and the circumstances which led him to leave Indiana. His health was the ostensible reason, but in reality his position as Vicar General and superior of the Seminary had become so intolerable that he could endure it no longer. His heart was in Indiana, however, and he was leaving it now with greater sorrow than he had felt on quitting his native land.

Again with this kind and wise counselor they went over their painful situation. He could no longer help them in Indiana, but he offered to go to Ruillé, and to engage the French superiors to contribute the pecuniary assistance which the migration would require and which Mother Mary had not thus far consented to give. "Like him," continues the narrative in the Annals,⁴⁷ we felt we, too, could find peace only in flight." How different was his situation however, that of an individual free to arrange his future from that of a poor group of religious women uncertain of a roof over their heads for the morrow and yet deterred by grave reasons from shaking the dust of Indiana from their feet. These reasons were the often expressed wish of the French Superiors that the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods would make every effort to remain in Indiana, the Bishop's threat to excommunicate them and demand an immense sum of money if they left, Mother Theodore's poor health, and finally the

⁴⁴ A Very Rev. Augustine Martin, New Orleans, 5 avril, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁵ Sister Saint Francis Xavier à Mgr. Bouvier, 29 janvier, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁶ Father Corbe à Rev. Augustine Martin, 3 février, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁷ Annals, Book I, p. 364.

universal feeling that Monseigneur de la Hailandière's tenure in the diocese would be very short. Father Corbe felt that he knew another reason, his influence: "You know that after all, I succeeded in saving the Community for Indiana," he later wrote to Father Martin.⁴⁸ The two friends left next day in the wagon over the dreadful roads of early spring, sorrowing Father Corbe accompanying Father Martin as far as Terre Haute.

Mother Theodore was now attending to the daily affairs of the Community and of the farm. Two cows died during this month, one of the best they had, and another cow lost her calf in the woods. The weather was variable, a heavy snowfall occurring after the feast of Saint Joseph. Sickness was rife among the Sisters and the pupils, and a novena to Saint Joachim was begun after Father Martin's departure for the needs of the Community. Just about this time a copy of the act of incorporation of the Community was received from Mr. Thomas Dowling of Terre Haute, who had been working upon the matter for some time. The ecclesiastical retreat was approaching, and Fathers Baquelin and Fischer stopped for a visit on their way to Vincennes. A few days earlier Father Roman Weinzoepflen passed through on his way to Evansville. After his liberation from the penitentiary at Jeffersonville where he had spent an unjust incarceration of a year,⁴⁹ he applied for admission to Father Sorin's Community at Notre Dame du Lac. He was very happy in his post of master of novices in this sanctuary of Our Lady, which he compared to the great Benedictine shrine of Einsiedeln in Europe. Bishop de la Hailandière had obtained a rescript in Rome, however, forbidding the Vincennes priests to join religious orders without his permission, and he ordered Father Weinzoepflen back to the diocese. Eventually this good priest was able to realize his spiritual ambitions and died a Benedictine at Saint Meinrad's.

The Sixth Council of Baltimore was approaching, and though not known of a certainty, it was generally expected throughout the diocese that the Bishop of Vincennes would again offer his resignation. That Rome had referred him to the Council was not apparently known either, but the troubles of the diocese were almost certain to be discussed by the assembled prelates. The Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were not alone in waiting with eyes fixed upon the Council. The Eudists of Saint Gabriel's College expected to present their difficulties, and Father Bellier had already received his invitation to the Council when he returned to Vincennes in March, 1846. Father Martin instead of sailing at once for France had remained at New Orleans as the guest of Bishop Blanc, and at the request of the Indiana clergy was to proceed to Baltimore to represent them. Archbishop Eccleston, who was to preside at the sessions of the Council, had sent word that data presented by the Indiana priests would be given consideration.⁵⁰ In addition to the matter of his resignation, Bishop de la Hailandière expected to place before the Council the reparation he was now asking of the Community.

⁴⁸ 16 septembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ Alerding, *History of Vincennes Diocese*, Chapter 31.

⁵⁰ Rev. S. Lalumiere to Very Rev. A. Martin, April [1846]. S.M.W.A.

Father Corbe was growing increasingly weary of the atmosphere of distress and uncertainty which accorded so ill with his peace-loving and timorous nature. He was now deprived also of the experienced counsels of Father Martin upon which he had hitherto leaned so heavily. He was therefore anxious to terminate matters as speedily as possible. He thought he perceived a disposition on the Bishop's part to grant what he had declared so often he would never give, the site of their motherhouse to the Community. The Sisters on their part were willing to offer any apology he might require which did not involve an offense to God. To write and sign that they had written anything but the truth to France, even at the Bishop's command, was to both Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Francis Xavier out of the question. They were moreover too intelligent and too upright to be deceived. Some of the other Sisters might have signed unwittingly or innocently any paper which His Lordship might present, but Father Corbe would not require nor permit this. Nevertheless as Ecclesiastical Superior he was charged with the negotiations. He felt that the Community had made a mistake not to leave while the Bishop was in Europe. Now Mother Theodore's shattered health interposed a fresh obstacle.

Many events however were to be crowded into these few weeks. On considering the Bishop's last letter containing a simple demand for reparation, the Community could have no objection to offering an apology for anything in their conduct in the past which might have offended His Lordship. They were not now required to act in any way contrary to the law of God. The old demand for a recantation so often repeated in the past was dropped, and the apology required seemed a simple act of humility. It was accordingly drawn up, signed and sent to him couched in respectful terms calculated to mollify him:

It is with our whole soul, it is even a consolation for our heart, not only to ask your pardon and offer our apologies for anything that in our conduct, in our intercourse, or in our letters may have escaped us contrary to the respect that we owe to Your Lordship, for whom we wish to preserve the most profound veneration, but we would all wish to be at your feet to ask pardon most humbly; and we would not rise until you said: Go, I pardon and bless you. These are the sentiments of all the Sisters of Providence.⁶¹

The Community seized the opportunity to advert to their difficult and anomalous situation, forced by His Lordship's refusal to approve their Rule to revert to the jurisdiction of the French superiors, as the American house was "still in reality a branch of the House in France." The separation from France had been his wish, and the American Sisters had consented. The French superiors had released the Community, but Bishop de la Hailandière had never done his part to consummate the separation by approving the Rule and thus making it possible for the Community to look upon him as their rightful superior and to settle definitively in the diocese. The letter referred again to the act of incorporation approved on January 14, 1846, by the Honorable James Whitcomb, Governor of Indiana, which definitely permitted to the "Female Seminary of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods" to exercise among other legal rights the power "to acquire,

⁶¹ *J. and L.*, p. 195.

hold, enjoy, and transfer property" and "to do acts necessary for the promotion of the arts and sciences and the prosperity of said seminary."⁵²

To this letter the Bishop replied with a long declaration that the Community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was his property temporal and spiritual, which they were to sign.⁵³ For this demand he offered as proof Mother Mary's letter of September, 1843, of which he had a copy, a personal and private letter "which could not be a valid instrument since it is a letter to an individual. Monseigneur knows this very well. He has therefore tried to obtain the paper which you signed during Mother Theodore's stay in France," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Bishop Bouvier. "He wishes to frighten the other Bishops and prevent them from receiving us into their dioceses by claiming a power which you never gave him, that is, absolute ownership of us."⁵⁴

Every week, sometimes almost every day, of these troubled years brought its own individual trial. Father Corbe was preparing after much hesitation to attend the ecclesiastical retreat, which was to take place before the Bishop left Vincennes for Baltimore and the Council. On arriving at Terre Haute on April 20, 1846, prepared to take the steamboat for Vincennes, he called for his mail and was astounded to find a letter from the Bishop removing him from his post of Ecclesiastical Superior and depriving him of all authority over the Community. Mystified and distressed, he abandoned all thought of going to Vincennes, and convinced that he could do nothing further for the Sisters in Indiana, he resolved to leave the diocese at once. Father Martin had recommended the Community to Most Reverend Peter Richard Kenrick, Bishop of Saint Louis, and Father Corbe decided to go there immediately and seek a refuge for them all. When he appeared again at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods so unexpectedly to get his trunk and other belongings, his news was received by the Community with grief and consternation. The feared and threatened excommunication could be but little worse than the loss of their chaplain and superior, as in both cases they would be deprived of Mass and the Sacraments.

We could not sufficiently admire the Providence of God over our Congregation, explained Sister Saint Francis Xavier in the Annals. If our Father had gone to Saint Louis as he intended, Monseigneur de la Hailandière would have sent us a priest of his own choice who would have followed the views of His Lordship, and we would have returned to his immediate jurisdiction. Monseigneur considered us to be in a state of rebellion and unworthy to receive the Sacraments. He threatened us at every moment with excommunication if we attempted to leave the diocese. Who can tell into what an abyss of evil our Congregation would have been plunged by the departure of our Father!⁵⁵

⁵² Original Charter, S.M.W.A.

⁵³ 14 avril, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁴ Sister Saint Francis Xavier à Mgr. Bouvier, 29 janvier, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁵ Annals, Book 1, p. 366.

CHAPTER XX

DIOCESAN AND COMMUNITY DIFFICULTIES REACH A LULL

"I always find a new sacrifice to make when I think I have reached the end."

MOTHER THEODORE

MENACED with another cross, the imminent loss of their superior and chaplain, Father Corbe, the Sisters began to storm heaven in a new extremity. Mother Theodore finally prevailed upon him to give up his determination to go to Saint Louis. Different plans for his future conduct were proposed and rejected one after another. If Father Corbe left, "What were we to do, poor sheep without a shepherd, but stray away and be lost?" wrote Mother Theodore.¹ The final decision was that he should proceed to Vincennes for the retreat and while there consult the Very Reverend John Timon, the Lazarist superior, who was to preach the exercises and who had been highly recommended by Father Martin. As soon as possible after reaching Vincennes, Father Corbe was to write to inform the Community at Saint Mary's of the results of his journey. If he thought it would be of advantage, he was to send for Mother Theodore.

His letter was delayed. He waited until he could send a definitive account of his interviews with both the Bishop and Father Timon. Sister Saint Francis Xavier gives us in the *Annals* a little intimate picture of their distress during the time from Father Corbe's departure on April 23, 1846, till his letter arrived one week later:

Mother was sure she would find a letter from our Father at the post office, and she started one evening for Terre Haute with Sister Mary Cecilia and Sister Francis Xavier. The weather was cloudy, and on the way the rain fell. Now and then Mother Theodore would say, "Shall I take the stage tonight?" "No, Mother," answered her Sisters, "you would be ill on the way. You have the fever already." "However," continued Mother, "if Father Corbe's letter declares that my presence is necessary for the good of our Congregation, you would let me go, and God would take care of me." Mother's uneasiness was very great when she found no mail for her, and it was even greater when during the conversation she learned that the letter they had sent to Father Corbe had been imprudently addressed by Sister Saint Francis Xavier directly to him. All three remembered that Monseigneur opened the mail of his priests when he suspected them of not thinking as he did. What would be his feelings on learning from our letter that at eleven o'clock at night we were in Terre Haute! No doubt he would think we were carrying into effect the project he so much feared, that we were leaving Saint Mary's.

And what would he not feel on finding that we had data ready to send to our Father? We feared that the weight of the Bishop's anger would fall upon our good superior who might in consequence be compelled to leave the diocese. We began to pray to the Blessed Virgin, and as always, she showed herself our good

¹ *J. and L.*, p. 200.

Mother. Eventually we learned that the letter had been handed still sealed to our Father, also that Father Timon encouraged him and us to remain in Indiana, giving him to understand that a new regime would be forthcoming in the diocese.²

At last on April 30 Father Corbe's long expected letter arrived:

Must I rejoice at coming to Vincennes or regret it? Truly I know not. I have been here only three days, and I have seen and heard astonishing things. It was seven o'clock when I arrived at the Bishop's house. I met His Lordship at the top of the outside steps. He received me, I think, the best he could with an attempt at a smile which resembled rather the grimace of a cat drinking vinegar. He took me at once to his room, but before reaching it while mounting the stairs a discussion opened between us which by its heat seemed destined to terminate in blows. This good Bishop was suffocated, and half of his words stuck in his throat. All this time I said only a few very quiet, even indifferent words, which seemed only to incense him the more. After a stormy half hour, things calmed down, and the supper bell terminated this first interview.

Immediately afterwards I was retiring to my room for I was fatigued in body and mind, but he came for me, and I had to begin another conference of not less than two hours in which however I saw no hope of any agreement. The next day, Friday, I did not see him. I went however to consult good Father Timon. I related in general the bases of the difficulties. He listened kindly, and his decision was that we should try as much as possible to come to an agreement. From what I told him of the house and its prosperity, he does not doubt that God wills the Community to remain where it is. . . . He agrees that an arrangement is extremely difficult, but it is nevertheless possible. We must therefore try to bring it about or at least wait one month longer before taking a decision. During this month many things may happen.

I had a third interview with the Bishop, and this time after much discussion, I perceived a great desire to reach a settlement. His conditions seemed greatly modified, but today, is it still the same? I doubt it very much. . . . I am almost sure however that I shall return to you. He has even repented of writing me that letter, and wishes very much for me to go back as superior or not at all.³

Father Corbe's apprehensions were seriously aroused however, and he feared greatly after he had seen the Bishop that he would cause the Community to be denounced by the Council of Baltimore as in a state of rebellion. As His Lordship still exacted a signed statement from them, Father Corbe drew up a rough draft of an act of submission which he brought with him on his return to Saint Mary's. The Bishop left at once for Baltimore at the close of the retreat, and the councilors at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods after much thought and prayer decided at last to sign the paper. By it they agreed to consider themselves as belonging permanently to the diocese, and the Bishop in turn was to give the motherhouse to the Community and approve the Rule. He had promised this upon his word as a Bishop. Father Corbe wrote at once to His Lordship at the Council that the Community was willing to sign the statement he had formulated.

The Sixth Council of Baltimore did not in general compare favorably in the number and importance of its decrees with those which preceded and followed it. It is memorable, however, for one outstanding measure, the choice of Mary Immaculate as patroness of the United States and of December 8, as patronal feast, also the insertion of the word *Immaculate*

² Book 1, p. 368.

³ Pmk., 29 avril, 1846. S.M.W.A.

in the Office and Mass of that day and of the invocation, "Queen conceived without original sin," in the Litany of Loretto. The published decrees numbered only four. One of these repeated the order of Propaganda secured by Bishop de la Hailandière during the previous year forbidding secular priests to join religious orders without the written permission of their Bishop. "Judging from the decrees alone, it would appear that the Council of 1846 was hardly necessary," writes the Reverend Doctor Peter Guilday in his *History of the Councils of Baltimore*.⁴ He also adverts to the fact that no mention occurs in the proceedings of the Council of 1846 of the anti-Catholic outrages of "that truly terrible year of 1844" when the Philadelphia riots took place, nor of the nativist activities of the two following years.

The Council was however the largest similar assembly yet convened in the United States, and the evening sermons and public ceremonies in the Baltimore Cathedral were attended by a vast and interested concourse of the laity. John Hughes, Bishop of New York, Martin John Spalding, future Archbishop of Baltimore, the two brothers, Francis Patrick Kenrick of Philadelphia and Peter Richard Kenrick of Saint Louis, Ignatius Aloysius Reynolds of Charleston, John B. Purcell of Cincinnati, Michael Portier of Mobile, and William Quarter of Chicago were among the twenty-three Bishops in attendance. Most Reverend Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore acted as president of the sessions. Three new Episcopal Sees were asked from Propaganda: Albany, Buffalo, and Cleveland, and eventually Bishop John McCloskey, the future Cardinal Archbishop of New York, Father John Timon, superior of the Lazarists or Vincentians, and Father Amadeus Rappe of Cleveland respectively were appointed to the new Bishopsrics. An untoward circumstance delayed action in Rome upon the requests and recommendations of the Council. Exactly one month from its opening on May 9, Pope Gregory XVI passed from this life, June 9, 1846, and although his successor, Pope Pius IX, was elected on June 14, eight months elapsed before the appointment of the Bishops was announced by the new Pope.

A new Bishop was also recommended for Vincennes. There is no mention in Dr. Guilday's history nor in the printed Acts and Decrees of the Council of the action which was taken upon the disorders in the diocese of Vincennes. A committee had been appointed to hear Bishop de la Hailandière, and to its members he proposed the reasons for his "insurmountable repugnance to continue in charge of the diocese," a distaste which dated from the first days of his episcopacy and "had not ceased to grow." His reasons were three: the difficulties of his administration "which now have increased to such a point as to appear insurmountable"; "inveterate prejudices" against him and opposition to him in the diocese continually on the increase especially since his return from France; and finally the poor state of his health. He had no plans, he said, and would "willingly remain" to work in the diocese of Vincennes, or retire to France and live with his brother and friends or with some religious community.⁵

⁴ P. 144.

⁵ Bishop de la Hailandière to an unnamed Cardinal, Baltimore, May 18, 1846. Original in Notre Dame Archives.

The assembled prelates who in the Council of 1843 had been unwilling to permit the Bishop of Vincennes to retire and, as he declared, had examined his rights over the Sisters of Providence and had judged them to include changing the Rules and shifting the Sisters, now in 1846 did just the contrary. They not only accepted his resignation and asked the Holy See to appoint his successor, but they advised him to approve the Sisters' Rule and put them in possession of the site of their motherhouse. The Bishops of the Council offered among others the name of Father John Stephen Bazin, Vicar General of the diocese of Mobile, to Propaganda as their preference for the next Bishop of Vincennes, and he was eventually appointed. Bishop de la Hailandière in the same rough draft of a letter to Rome, quoted above, mentions three names which he had proposed to the Council, Fathers Timon, de Goesbriand, and Bazin. "The first," he writes, "is the one above all others whose name I desire to be received by the Holy See."⁶ He was, however, as we have seen, named not for Vincennes but as first Bishop of Buffalo. That Monseigneur de la Hailandière remained in possession of the See of Vincennes for seventeen months after the Council till the consecration of his successor, Bishop-elect Bazin, in October, 1847, was due largely to the inevitable interruption of orderly procedure in Rome owing to the death of the Pope.

During this last year and a half of Bishop de la Hailandière's incumbency in the See of Vincennes, the general unrest was so open and so intense that, as he had said of himself at the Council of Baltimore, he had "not a moment of tranquility or repose."⁷ The older and influential priests who had not been permanently alienated could now including his nephew probably be counted on one hand. The laity were also deeply involved. Only the faithful French serving maids remained in the main true to the Bishop. "I do not think there is in all the world a man so universally detested as the Bishop of Vincennes."⁸ This bitter animosity which surrounded him he seemed to wreak upon the defenseless Sisters in the woods of Vigo County, and the fear and distress which pervaded the Community during all these months bordered on a state of agony. The Bishop's attitude far from improving seemed steadily to grow more hostile. "In not a single circumstance in which he can oppress us does he fail to do so," wrote Mother Theodore in one of the long confidential letters to France which were the only solace she could permit to her overburdened heart.

Yet even under this dreadful cross no resentment, no bitterness found entrance to her mind. "The Bishop has many good qualities," she wrote. "He is pious, zealous, sober, has fine manners, and so forth." Then with the ever-present abasement of the humble heart, she adds, "What harm the smallest faults do in persons who are placed over others! This example makes one tremble even to have the least authority."⁹ Not even to the councilors, almost all younger¹⁰ and all less experienced and more timorous and distressed than herself, could the Foundress confide her

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Mother Theodore à Mère Saint Charles, 6 janvier, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Sister Marie Joseph only, born in 1796, was two years older than Mother Theodore.

cruellest apprehensions. The older Sisters, who made up the greater number of the Community, knew however almost everything, and misfortune bound their hearts together with hoops of steel. To the novices and young Sisters, Mother Theodore must ever remain her motherly loving self, brightening their recreations by her gaiety and giving them no hint of the heavy cross she had to carry almost alone.

To their other anxieties at this time was added the urgent need of building an addition to the academy. Sister Saint Francis Xavier details the circumstances in the Annals:

The time had come when we must either build or send away our pupils. The bricks destined for the construction were deteriorating day by day. The time of our retreat was approaching. Several of our Sisters were to be proposed for profession or for reception as novices, but how could they engage themselves before God to fulfill Rules which the Bishop of the diocese would not approve? How could we visit the establishments? What could we reply to the missionary priests who required guarantees of stability in exchange for the sacrifices they imposed upon themselves to secure Sisters? Could we even take charge of a single orphan, we who knew not but that a month later we might be homeless? The operations of our Community were we might say dead, or rather our entire Congregation was in its agony.¹¹

On the missions the Sisters felt the same. A young girl in Madison wished to enter the novitiate, but Sister Saint Liguori hesitated, "not knowing," as she wrote to Mother Theodore, "in what state our affairs are and whether it would be prudent to bring a young person to the Community in the condition in which we are."¹²

Anxiety about the outcome of the Council persisted throughout the diocese even after its close, for the proceedings were not made public. The Bishop's letter to Father Corbe gave no hint of the fact that his resignation had been accepted, nor that his successor's name as selected by the Council, had been forwarded to Rome:

Baltimore, May 15, 1846.

I was anxious to receive your letter, my dear friend, for we will finish our deliberations tomorrow. The Sisters' submission has come therefore in time. It would have been more meritorious in the eyes of men if I had not had to wait for it so long; if it had arrived before the poor sham Vicar General of the Eudists was forced to decamp covered with shame; before Mr. Martin's intrigues and duplicity and his efforts to appear before the Council had been discovered by the Archbishop and the Bishops; before a judgment had been passed upon the conduct of the Bishop of Le Mans, and before so much respect, esteem, and affection had been shown toward me by the Fathers of the Council.

If the statement is such as you tell me, I engage myself from the present moment by this letter to give Saint Mary's to the Sisters, with some conditions but none that I have not already made known and which you have agreed to. I promise also to approve their constitutions, publicly and in writing, since they wish it, on condition however of the necessary change of names of personages and a new edition in English. If some points need to be altered, a committee of a few priests can see to it and submit the changes to the Sisters, etc., etc. They may then build without fear.¹³

¹¹ Book 1, p. 367.

¹² 28 juin, 1846. S.M.W.A.

¹³ S.M.W.A.

This letter seemed a solution of the main Community difficulties, but the fact of the Bishop's resignation and consequent approaching replacement, which would have meant so much to the Sisters and the diocese, remained a secret. That the prelates at the Council had decided to arrange for a change in Indiana was probably due in large part to Bishop Bouvier's letter to Archbishop Eccleston received at the opening of the Council in which was detailed the refusal of Bishop de la Hailandière to approve the Sisters' Rules or give them their motherhouse or to permit their migration elsewhere. Bishop Bouvier's reputation for sanctity and learning was so great as to give immense weight to his plea for the Community. "Estimable Bishop Bouvier . . . I venerate as one of the holiest and most learned prelates in Europe," wrote Archbishop Eccleston somewhat later.¹⁴ Mother Theodore felt that the Community's debt to him was immeasurable. "I can truly say," she wrote to Mother Mary, "that if we have obtained from the Bishop of Vincennes anything for the good of our house in America, it is, after God and the Blessed Virgin, to Monseigneur of Le Mans that we owe it."¹⁵

The action of Rome upon the proceedings of the Council was however still uncertain. Pope Gregory XVI was now no more, and although Pius IX had been elected without unusual delay, no one knew what would be done for Indiana. Conflicting opinions led through the diocese to the prolonged and bitter uncertainty which is almost worse than disaster. Bishop Chabrat of Louisville told Mother Theodore that Bishop de la Hailandière's resignation had been offered in a manner not to be accepted,¹⁶ and Archbishop Eccleston wrote to Bishop Bouvier, "The Bishop of Vincennes . . . is using his utmost endeavors to free himself from the administration of his diocese. Will he succeed in doing so?"¹⁷

Bishop de la Hailandière's own attitude was not made public for a long time, but he had probably already decided to exert every effort to remain in Vincennes in charge of the temporalities of the diocese, leaving the administration of spiritual matters to his successor. He later made this proposal to Bishop Bazin, and he was said to have also offered it to Propaganda through the intermediary of his brother Joseph, who made at his request a special journey to Rome for this purpose. Father Martin during his stay in Europe on Archbishop Eccleston's advice had also taken up the affairs of the Vincennes diocese with the Roman authorities. All these conflicting currents contributed no doubt to impede the action of the Roman authorities in solving the difficulties of the Vincennes diocese.

The act of reparation signed by the Sisters was generally disapproved by the Indiana priests and others who knew the circumstances, and Father Corbe was blamed for permitting and arranging it. "I do not condemn these poor Sisters," wrote Father Martin to Bishop Bouvier. "They have yielded to a moral torture, but first of all, there is no uprightness in that, and in the second place, they have furnished arms against themselves for a future attack."¹⁸ A brief rough draft in Father Corbe's writing of the

¹⁴ To Sister Saint Francis Xavier, June 18, 1847. S.M.W.A.

¹⁵ 16 juin, 1846. S.M.W.A.

¹⁶ *Annals*, p. 382.

¹⁷ 29 septembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

¹⁸ *Life of Mother Theodore*, p. 344.

text of the apology to Bishop de la Hailandière has been preserved, but the final copy was much longer. The Community had refused too many times to sign any falsehoods to fail in uprightness now. Their apology was truthful and sincere. It did not ask pardon for faults of which the Community had not been guilty, nor did it refer to the six years of persecution which they had suffered so bravely. It was a general expression of regret for anything in their manner towards the Bishop which might have displeased him. This formula was the only one they could conscientiously sign. "We must have had an immense desire to remain in the diocese to have accepted the humiliating terms of this document," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, "but we thought that God asked the sacrifice of us since our Father thought proper to propose it to us."¹⁹

The effect of this act at the Council was not however favorable. It was in fact received with considerable surprise and some displeasure. "The Bishop of Vincennes has made us pass for a group of children or crack-brained women at the Baltimore Council. Our Father Corbe's letter ruined everything," wrote Sister Liguori to Mother Theodore. "'They do not know what they want.' . . . Those are Bishop Chabrat's words."²⁰ When Mother Theodore read those lines, she must have felt that her cup of humiliation was full, but she could not now yield to discouragement but must proceed to make the best of circumstances.

One immediate result of Bishop de la Hailandière's letter from Baltimore already quoted was the determination on the part of the Community to build at once the two badly needed wings to the academy. The Bishop had promised privately, publicly, and in writing to deed them the property, a promise however which he never kept. The Community actually received the valid deeds only from Bishop Bazin on his deathbed nearly two years later, after Bishop de la Hailandière had been gone for months from Indiana. The constantly augmenting number of pupils at the academy rendered an addition to the existing building an imperative necessity. That the number they had were accommodated thus far was possible, as Mother Theodore remarked, only on the frontier. A frame addition had been erected the previous year at the rear of the academy building to relieve in part the crowded conditions of the school. The materials left from the church, bricks, lime, and stone, to be purchased from the Bishop, had been assembled on the site for some time, and he now handed over some six hundred dollars, what was left of the yearly subsidy of six thousand francs from the Propagation of the Faith, which had been in his possession for over a year. This sum was specifically set apart for the Community in the large allotment he received from the officials of the Society in France. As the Sisters were now self-supporting, and the Bishop had no expense for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, he was obliged to pay them the money.

During May Mother Theodore made her usual visitation of the establishments, and during her absence concluded arrangements with Monseigneur to begin the building operations. The contract was signed on June 18, 1846, with the two skilled builders, Jean Marie Marcile and

¹⁹ *Les Annales*, p. 40. S.M.W.A.

²⁰ 21 juin, 1846. S.M.W.A.

Jacques Roquet. The Bishop's plan, though five thousand francs more expensive, than the one preferred by the Community, was accepted, and the corps of carpenters and masons, fourteen in number, arrived from Vincennes on July 8. Next day the digging of the foundation began.

The new wings harmonized in structure and appearance with the original building and trebled the available living space. The lofty arched windows, the external pilasters and cornice accentuated the elegance and good taste of the general construction. The side entrances were approached by flights of steps with graceful wrought iron railings similar to those at the front. The work progressed steadily, and by mid-September both wings were under roof, and the shingling had begun. At the end of the month the two chief carpenters had left, and the contract for painting the building was signed. At this time Mother Theodore took advantage of the fine fall weather to make several trips to buy furniture. On November 23 the piercing cold obliged the masons to abandon their work, but the interior finishing went on. Finally, on the last day of 1846, some of the children slept in the new dormitory. In mid-January Messrs. Marcile and Eluère departed with their men. Mother Theodore would like to have kept Prosper Eluère, an expert iron-worker and locksmith, but his young bride was waiting for him in Vincennes. Roquet was still living near Saint Mary's and could see to the final touches on the building. The expense eventually went beyond Mother Theodore's calculations. "The cost of building is very great," she wrote to Bishop Bouvier, "and we are getting into debt in spite of ourselves."

Although the decision to build had been dependent upon the Bishop's written promise to vest the property at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in the name of the Community, the deeds were not received till July when he paid a three-day visit to Saint Mary's. Though he gave only eighty acres of his much larger holdings, the Sisters received them gratefully. On examining the deed more at leisure however after Monseigneur's departure on July 17, their joy changed to uncertainty and a sort of consternation. One clause forbade any alienation, change, or improvement in the property without the consent of Bishop de la Hailandière or his heirs. The truncated ownership involved in such a transfer suggested the illegality inherent in the deed itself. Mother Theodore was by this time familiar with the Indiana property laws, and she at once suspected that the deed was worthless. She continued however to hope. "The Bishop has promised to approve our Rule and has given us a considerable portion of his property of Saint Mary's," she wrote in October, 1846.²¹

The deed was submitted to a lawyer for examination. There were several attorneys among the fathers of the academy pupils, but much of Mother Theodore's legal work was attended to by Benjamin M. Thomas, the young lawyer from Pennsylvania, who had been established in Vincennes since 1839. Mother Theodore tells the result of the examination of the transfer. "They say the deed which the Bishop has given us is null and void."²² Nevertheless with the encouragement of Father Timon, who insisted that a change was at hand,²³ the building went on.

²¹ A Mgr. Bouvier, 20 octobre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²² A Mgr. Bouvier, 31 octobre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²³ *Life of Mother Theodore*, p. 347.

Fearing a recrudescence of Bishop de la Hailandière's desire to compel the Community to hold an election for superior general, the Sisters had written for advice to Bishop Bouvier with the assistance of the saintly pastor of Evansville, Father Deydier, and without Mother Theodore's knowledge, as we have seen. Now she herself also without their knowledge was seeking to retire. Her broken health was her principal reason, and as early as March, 1846, we find her writing to France her proposal to withdraw as soon as the current difficulties had been solved. Her recovery from her last terrible illness she regarded as a visible miracle. "The winter fever, a cruel malady," she wrote, "is never light when once it attacks a person. Five winters I have passed in America, and four times I have been its victim." Regarding her retirement she did not anticipate great difficulties:

If we remain in Indiana, the question in my opinion would offer very little difficulty. . . . If God would spare me a few months longer, I could aid the newly-elected superior in the management of affairs; then when I die, I would not have the heartache of leaving these poor children like sheep without a shepherd.²⁴

As yet, although Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer had remained assistant since her appointment by Mother Mary, none of the regular offices of the Particular Council, secretary, econome, nor mistress of novices, had been filled on account of the youth and lack of experience of the greater part of the Community and of the necessity of keeping the most capable Sisters on the missions as local superiors. Mother Theodore wrote to Bishop Bouvier her anxieties and conclusions. She felt the great need for a few trained religious from the Ruillé Community to act as local superiors, an employment for which the American Sisters showed almost no aptitude.

There are not among our American Sisters any subjects capable of this employment. We can not even, at present, place them at the head of our missions, as for that they need training under good local superiors in governing others and managing a house, things to which their education renders them alien. With time and care it is possible to mold them, but I repeat we must have good local superiors. . . . If our good Mother would make the sacrifice of at least two Sisters of upright judgment and solid piety, this help would, I think, be sufficient to establish solidly our house in America. They need not have absolutely a finished education, as our need for virtue is greater than for learning. Consult with our Mother, if you please, Monseigneur, as to what you can and will do for us.²⁵

For the post of superior general, the Foundress felt she must call upon her own Sisters. Sister Saint Francis Xavier was generally reserved for the position of Mistress of Novices. Mother Theodore knew also Mother Mary's opinion of her, that she was "fit only to love God." She herself found her still at this period, though the acknowledged saint of the Community, sometimes unduly severe and easily deceived by external marks of piety which might connote no real virtue. "She is feared and venerated by all however," wrote the Foundress, "but is still herself in constant need of direction and as yet entirely unable to proceed alone." Mother Theodore did not therefore recommend her for superior. Of Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer she wrote:

²⁴ A Mère Saint Charles, 17 mars, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²⁵ 26 novembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

Our Mother and Sisters must not count upon Sr. St. V. for the head of this house, because after all that took place at the retreat,²⁶ not a single Sister would accept her as superior. To attempt this measure would be to destroy the house.²⁷

The Foundress did, however, specify three others whom she thought would function successfully as superior general, Sister Saint Liguori, Sister Mary Cecilia, and Sister Angelina. If an election could be held during the coming retreat, a superior general and several councilors could be chosen then.

That would accustom them to go on by themselves, she wrote, and my death would not make much of a breach in this poor little work. . . . I repeat, nothing would be more calculated to appease His Lordship, the Bishop of Vincennes, than my resignation, if not my exclusion, a last sacrifice before which I would not recoil for the benefit of a work for which I would give my life, if it were necessary, for I see how it would redound to the glory of God. Therefore if you wish to recall me, I am ready to leave.²⁸

The Sisters were aware of Mother Theodore's desire to retire, and they opposed it by reasons and by pleading whenever the question arose. Not so however the Bishop of Vincennes. The Community had anchored itself in Indiana by investing every penny in the building project now in progress at Saint Mary's. The deed the Bishop had given had to be returned to him as invalid. It had not been rectified, and the Rule was not yet approved. Bishop de la Hailandière had said many times that he would never give it his approbation. Now he had publicly promised to do so, and to give St. Mary's to the Community. To avoid fulfilling these two obligations, one thing was necessary, to drive Mother Theodore from the diocese, attempted so often before, but now to be approached from a new angle.

During her stay in Vincennes in May, 1846, the Bishop sent for her to come to his house and reproached her at length for all the troubles and difficulties of the Community of which, he said, she alone was the cause. She humbly begged pardon and besought him to tell her these faults in order that she might correct them. Immediately he replied that the only thing for her to do was to write to France to ask to be recalled and to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to the Sisters that "it is of your own accord that you are leaving your Community to think of your salvation." This proposition threw Mother Theodore into cruel uncertainty and affliction.²⁹ It was in truth consonant with her desires to withdraw and allow the Sisters before her death to choose freely the one whom they wished to replace her, but to resign thus under duress, which the Bishop was forbidden by Canon Law to exert, was quite another matter. She did not therefore accede at once to his demand but agreed to place the matter before her superior and confessor, Father Corbe. She wrote begging him to come at once to Vincennes. He started on June 9, 1846.

At first he could hardly believe that Monseigneur was thus practically forcing Mother Theodore to leave the diocese, but carrying out his project in such a manner as to obviate any blame to himself for her departure.

²⁶ P. 451.

²⁷ 26 novembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²⁸ 17 mars, 1846. S.M.W.A.

²⁹ Annals, Book 1, p. 370.

A visit by Father Corbe to His Lordship however proved that this was alas, only too truly his determination.

He went to see the Bishop but had not the courage to return and bring me an account of his interview. I saw him yesterday morning; he told me that Monseigneur wishes absolutely for me to go away. Father Corbe counseled me however to wait before taking any steps and said he would come in the afternoon to tell me what had passed between him and His Lordship whom he must see again.

You can understand well, my good Mother, in what anguish of mind and heart I passed my day. I did not weep. I feel that the source of my tears is dried up. . . . Finally, our Father arrived badly beaten. He did not however bring me the order to depart, Monseigneur having said no more about it. I saw the Bishop this morning. . . . He no longer tells me to leave, but this day, this week, will they pass without my receiving the order to depart from this dear mission? I do not know. . . . I may soon make another [journey] longer and less costly in transportation, as my health is singularly altered. *Eh bien*, be it as the good God wills. I desire nothing more.³⁰

Truly despite the faith and resignation which brightened their cross, the lot of the Community was during these months a death in life. They had however escaped once more, and on the Saturday after Corpus Christi, June 20, the diary records the return to Saint Mary's of Father Corbe, Mother Theodore, and Sister Caroline. The Community, distressed beyond words at their Mother's silence and her long and unexplained absence, could embrace her again and try to console her for her life of daily humiliation and anxiety.

The Sisters from the missions began to arrive in mid-July, and on August 5 the Bishop reached Saint Mary's with the Reverend George A. Hamilton, Vicar General of the Chicago diocese,³¹ whom he had selected to preach the retreat for the Community. "The retreat gave great consolation to the good missionary who directed it," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier in the *Annals*,³² but two days before its close on the feast of the Assumption, Monseigneur suddenly demanded an election for the office of superior general. This it was that the Community had been anticipating in fear and trembling. The Bishop had been preparing for it himself for some months, coaching Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, who was his choice for the post, addressing her as "the little Mother," and bestowing upon her great marks of preference. He broached the subject first to Sister Mary Cecilia. "But, Monseigneur," she answered, "you have not fulfilled

³⁰ A Mère Marie, 16 juin, 1846. S.M.W.A.

³¹ Data regarding this estimable priest who died suddenly in Lafayette, April 8, 1875, and is buried beneath a memorial slab in Saint Mary's Cathedral there which he built, are very confusing. He was born in Marion County, Kentucky, and educated at Saint Mary's College, Lebanon, Ky., and at the Lazarist Seminary, at the Barrens, Perryville, Mo. He received minor orders from the Most Rev. Joseph Rosati in Saint Louis, March 28, 1831, and finished his studies at the College of Propaganda, and was ordained in Rome. In 1838 he was appointed pastor at Springfield, Illinois, and in 1846 was pastor at North Arm and Vicar General of the Chicago diocese. The date of his birth, April, 1819, on the above mentioned tablet, given elsewhere as 1815, is evidently an error. He is often confused with another Kentucky priest of the identical name, pastor of Saint Mary's and Saint Francis de Sales's churches, Charlestown, Mass., who died there July 31, 1874 (Cf. Lord, Sexton, Harrington, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, vol. 3, p. 262).

³² Book 1, p. 372.

your promise to approve our Rule." When Father Corbe was approached, he formally rejected the Bishop's proposition. It was not possible, said the Chaplain, to perform the election according to Rule, and the Sisters were opposed to it. No one, not even the Bishop, had the power to compel them to hold an election or to appoint a superior. Moreover, continued Father Corbe, in his opinion there was not in the Community at that time a single person other than Mother Theodore capable of filling the post of superior general. Nevertheless, he made the matter known to the Community.

They were thrown at once again into cruel anxiety. Mother Theodore wished to withdraw "believing that her departure might perhaps give back peace to her dear Congregation."³³ She consulted the retreat master. The councilors also sought advice from him.

The priest who preached our retreat, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, had strongly urged us to let ourselves be excommunicated rather than consent to transgress our Rule in a point which would have led to the destruction of our Community. . . . We had greatly feared that his advice would not coincide with what had been given us by the Bishop of Le Mans, but God . . . inspired this worthy missionary with words which we might have heard at Ruillé or Le Mans.³⁴

The missionary Father was convinced that God wished Mother Theodore to remain at her post. "He found our position painful, but thought as did the councilors that the election ought to be declined."³⁵ Just at this time too a letter arrived from Mother Mary in reply to Mother Theodore's communication of the previous March proposing to resign her office. The French superior had seen Father Martin, and her advice was practically the same as that of Father Hamilton. The next step after a day and two nights of anguish was to apprise His Lordship of their unanimous wish not to make any change in the actual status of the Community. All had been arranged in advance with Father Corbe, and Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer was chosen to act as spokesman for the group in making their representation to His Lordship. Trembling with apprehension they appeared before him. He refused to listen to them, or as a result to be present at the close of the retreat next day, but departed however without openly and publicly deposing Mother Theodore in the chapel, or excommunicating the entire Community, as had been feared.

As a consequence, however, of all that had happened, matters continued to go from bad to worse. In addition Mother Theodore's conscience became deeply alarmed at her anomalous and precarious situation. She wrote in great distress of mind to Bishop Bouvier:

Of all the crosses God has been pleased to send me since I have been in America, this one weighs most heavily on my heart. By remaining here against the will of my Bishop, I have obeyed, it is true, the superior whom he had given and still leaves over the Community and also the ecclesiastic who gave our retreat and who commanded me under pain of sin to remain in my place. But have they the right to keep me here contrary to the will of my chief superior, my Bishop? Am I not in so dangerous a position opposing the will of God? . . . O my good and venerated Father, this is the subject of my uneasiness and of the bitter tears that

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ A Mère Marie, 24 août, 1846. S.M.W.A.

³⁵ *Annals*, Book 1, p. 372.

I have shed so often since the retreat. It seems that God has withdrawn His blessing from us, and without His help what will become of this work.³⁶

The reply to this letter and to other similar ones was ever the same: "It is our opinion that as long as it is humanly possible Sister Theodore should remain at her post."

To the usual post-Retreat events of this year was added the opening of a new house at Fort Wayne. As Monseigneur had left immediately without presiding at the ceremonies on the feast of the Assumption, *Notre Père* Corbe as Ecclesiastical Superior, received the vows of Sister Angelina and conferred the religious habit upon three postulants, Sister Monique, who had accompanied Mother Theodore from France in 1843, Sister Michel Guthneck, *Père Michel's* youngest daughter and his namesake, and Sister Rose, Eva Haag, a young German postulant. The relics of the martyr Saint Urban, presented by Monseigneur to Mother Theodore on his return from France a year earlier were brought in procession on August 16 from the church to the Community chapel where they were enshrined. On August 27, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer returned to Vincennes, the last of the missionaries to leave. Not all the newly vested novices were sent to the missions. Some of the early Sisters had entered for domestic service and owing to the rapid enlargement of the academy and the consequent increase in labor were very useful at the motherhouse and were retained there. The Bishop had given this as one of his reasons for refusing to remain the immediate superior of the Community: "What is the good of keeping on receiving *domestics as novices*, and after all why retain them all at Saint Mary's? Are they not needed on the missions also?"³⁷

All the Sisters' names retained the French forms and pronunciation long after the Community had become almost entirely Americanized. This complete fusion with their adopted country occurred much sooner owing to the discontinuance of accretions from Ruillé, Sister Mary Theodore in 1854 being the only French Sister of Providence who joined the American Community after the original seven. The French superiors in America delighted to give their novices names dear to them in France, and by a strange coincidence it later happened that the two Mother Anastasies were in office as superior general at the same time in France and in America. The beautiful name of Michel became less commonly used in the Community largely owing to the inveterate American tendency to call it Mitchell. Sister Michel later became Sister Mary Francis.

Three days after the feast of the Assumption, Mother Theodore and Sister Basilide had set out to make the foundation at Fort Wayne accompanied by the three foundresses. "Our saintly Sister Mary Magdalen," as Sister Saint Francis calls her, had been taken from Vincennes to be superior of the new house, her companions, Sister Catherine and Sister Caroline. At this juncture appears first in the Community history the name of the Reverend Julian Benoit, who had been pastor since 1840 of Saint Augustine's Church at Fort Wayne. His long missionary career among them endeared him permanently to his people to whom he was

³⁶ 20 octobre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

³⁷ Original in Notre Dame Archives.

father and friend for nearly half a century. To Mother Theodore and the Sisters of Providence he was for the same period, forty-five years, what she invariably calls him in the records, "our benefactor, good Mr. Benoit." In after years later generations of Sisters did not change but rather intensified the affectionate gratitude with which, after the use of the title Mr. for the clergy was discontinued, and even after his elevation to the rank of domestic prelate, he was called simply "Father Benoit," and was prayed for by name each evening for many years after his death, as he had requested, by the grateful Sisters of Saint Augustine's.

One very painful experience of this time illustrates the uncertainty in which the Community lived. From outside sources they had learned that His Lordship was arranging to replace the Sisters of Providence in Vincennes by members of another religious order. As he had said nothing at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods of his intentions, the Sisters' grief and surprise was extreme, not knowing what further procedure against them might follow. As she so often did during these troubled years, Mother Theodore spent the night before the Blessed Sacrament and silently committed the issue to God. Great consolation came to the Foundress during these long hours of vigil, and when next day Father Corbe asked her the reason for the peace and joy which had shone upon her countenance at the moment of Holy Communion, she acknowledged what he already knew that her crosses melted away in deep spiritual consolation."³⁸ Weeks went by however, and by one of the changes so frequent in the Bishop's administration, the matter, to the Sisters' great relief, was eventually forgotten.

The yield on the farm during this summer and autumn was larger than ever before. Mother Theodore was able to send over twenty-five hundred pounds of wheat to the mill to be ground. The hay was harvested in four days, and the crop of a thousand bushels of corn, so valuable as forage for the animals and, when ground, as corn meal for the Community, was equally satisfactory. The white bread made from wheat continued to be saved in large measure for the pupils, and the Community lived upon cornbread. Venison continued still occasionally to be an article of diet, and about this time Father Corbe when out hunting in the woods shot a deer. Accidents occurred now and then on the farm. The circle of ravines which ringed the grounds necessitated bridges at different points as is still the case. Some of these early bridges had no hand rail, and two large oxen yoked together fell from the bridge at the farm about this time. "They were not much hurt, however," writes Mother Theodore.

The colorful glory of the autumn woods and the rich fruitage of the nut trees, so abundant in autumn on the Wabash, made the fall season ideal for outings for the postulants. Passing by the towering oaks which clustered to their very dooryard and crossing also the dense beechwood, remains of which still dot the hills near the greenhouses, the nutting expeditions sought out the hickory and walnut and butternut trees, and the hazel copses. Here Sisters and postulants and pupils in mid-October rambled abroad to gather the stores of nuts with which the ground was covered and to shake them from the trees. From the earliest years Saint Teresa's day, Mother Theodore's patronal feast, was nutting day, and the

³⁸ *Life of Mother Theodore*, p. 349.

generous yield lasted all through the winter. The wild grapes, too, were ripe at this season, the purple clusters hanging from the vines which clambered from tree to tree. They were carefully gathered for preserves, and the American postulants could always locate the paw paw and persimmon trees. The Foundress always accompanied the Sisters, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier was there too with her postulants to join in the gay recreation of the day, but on Saint Teresa's day in 1846, as always in the lives of God's chosen ones, the cross was not far away.

"Will it be my destiny," wrote Mother Theodore to Mother Mary two weeks later from Madison, "at my age and with my infirmities to render the last duties to these beloved companions whom I precede by so many years in life's career?"³⁹ She had left Saint Mary's hurriedly at the news of Sister Saint Liguori's serious illness, and now from the foot of her bed, "which is very probably her deathbed," the sorrowing Foundress was pouring out her heart in another of the long letters to France, her only solace.

She is stricken with an acute chest ailment which is making the most alarming progress under our very eyes, in spite of all the skill that is lavished upon her by a good German physician located in this city. The right lung is entirely congested and no longer functions at all; the left is quite weak, still weaker it seems to me this morning than it was last evening. If it is attacked as suddenly as the other was, in two days she will be no longer of this world. Poor dear child! This is the first cause of pain that she has ever given.⁴⁰

Two days later the patient was "still alive and even somewhat better," but the Foundress had to leave her to return to Saint Mary's. "I am like the Wandering Jew," she wrote, "nearly always going and on the road. Judge how I advance in perfection."⁴¹

Grief was general at the prospective loss of this fine and capable young Sister, so excellent a local superior that despite her youth of twenty-eight years the Community had looked to her as a possible successor to Mother Theodore if excommunication or dismissal from the diocese should overtake the Foundress, a constantly impending threat from the Bishop, later alas, unfortunately to be realized. Mother Theodore had seen at once that all human remedies in Sister Saint Liguori's case were useless. She wrote however to the Sisters to pray earnestly and perseveringly for the invalid. "We did so," writes Sister Saint Francis Xavier, "but in spite of ourselves we felt that God had heard our dear Sister's prayers and was going to accept the sacrifice she had made of her life in order that He would prolong that of our Mother and preserve our Congregation from what seemed inevitable ruin."⁴² Sister Saint Liguori's days were in fact now numbered. She lingered in Madison till the end of December, loath to leave the place where she had done so much good. Mother Theodore tells her anxieties in a long letter written to Mother Saint Charles at Ruillé on January 6, 1847:

Our woods are so icy that it is impossible to go even to Terre Haute. . . . What a loss for us this good Sister Liguori is! Everybody feels it deeply, especially Sister

³⁹ A Mère Marie, 31 octobre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Annals*, Book 1, p. 375.

Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Mary Cecilia (she was their hope to replace me), but no one more sincerely regrets this dear daughter than I do. The breach her loss will make cannot be repaired. . . .

Another Sister is dying here, our good little Sister Seraphine. We had the greatest fear these latter days that she might die without the succors of Religion. Our good Father is at Vincennes whither the Bishop called him two weeks ago, and we do not know whether he will return. It would be physically impossible for him to do so now so long as the cold weather continues. Our dear Lord sent us one of our missionaries who happened to be on this side [of the river], and not being able to go any farther, he is obliged to await more favorable weather.

He gave the last Sacraments to our dear dying Sister, and he says Mass for us daily. Sister Seraphine is twenty years of age; she has been with us four and a half years. She is admirable in patience, guilelessness, and uprightness. It is doubtful that she has ever lost her baptismal innocence. We have not the courage to ask God to cure her; she would not wish it. But for our dear Sister Liguori's restoration, we have indeed prayed. Heaven has been deaf to our supplications. I can assure you it costs much this time to say *Fiat*.⁴³

We have seen with what distress Mother Theodore received on January 13, 1847, the letter twelve days overdue which announced Sister Saint Liguori's departure from Madison two weeks earlier. Next day after immense dangers and difficulties she could at last close her eyes, peaceful though exhausted, in her bed in the infirmary where little Sister Seraphine, still a novice, was dying. Sister Saint Francis Xavier tells with what joy "Laughing Eliza," now so wasted and wan, saw again her first confessor, Father de Saint-Palais, who had recommended her to Mother Theodore four years earlier. Father Corbe's inexplicable absence in Vincennes had lasted since December 28. Father de Saint-Palais remained several days, and on January 17 brought Holy Viaticum to both patients. He left however to return to his parish on the eighteenth, and Father Corbe returned on January 23 after an absence of nearly four weeks in Vincennes. Next day he administered Extreme Unction to Sister Saint Liguori, who was now sinking fast.

On the 25th and 26th, recorded Mother Theodore, the invalid continued very low; on the 27th in the morning she was still worse. Toward ten o'clock we recited the prayers for the agonizing. She answered them calmly and with presence of mind, as though she were not ill at all. At one o'clock this same morning our good Father had given her Holy Communion. After that she was not able to retain anything, and about eight in the evening she had a crisis . . . which caused us to think the end was at hand. *Notre Père*, for whom she had called, gave her the indulgence of a happy death. She continued to suffer greatly all night, and at midnight I had the Community called. We recited again the prayers for the dying and others which she followed attentively. When we had finished, she asked me to thank the Sisters and to ask them to go to the chapel and recite for her the *Miserere*, and making a great effort she added "and the *Memorare* also." From this time she lost the use of speech almost entirely, sight also, but gave evident signs of entire consciousness. She kissed her crucifix lovingly and seemed united to her God. At last Holy Mass was offered for her, and a little before eight a. m. she slept in the Lord surrounded by her Sisters who prayed and wept by her bed.⁴⁴

It was January 29, 1847, the first death in the Community. "We had a coffin of cherry wood covered with heavy black goods and lined with

⁴³ S.M.W.A.

⁴⁴ Diary.

white. . . . We surrounded her with flowers and placed a crown of white roses on her head.”⁴⁵

The remains were exposed in the Community chapel till the next day when Father Corbe, assisted by Father Lalumiere, officiated at the burial, sang the nocturnes of the Office of the Dead, and celebrated the Requiem Mass in the church. Four Sisters carried the white pall over the coffin, the others followed with lighted tapers. She was interred in a double coffin near the chancel at the north of the village church among the departed pioneers of the settlement. Sister Saint Francis Xavier gives some touching details of this first great bereavement of the Community:

She was the first victim which death chose from among us, or rather God took her from the dangers which threatened to destroy our Congregation to plead our cause at the tribunal of His mercy. How many times have we not been consoled by the thought that she was praying for us in heaven! How could she forget her Sisters, she who when Mother Theodore exhorted her to thank God for the grace of dying in the bosom of the Catholic Church, added in her expiring voice, “and in my Community.” Her Congregation, that was indeed the dearest object of her love in this land of exile, and when she saw that Our Lord in the splendor of His Glory loved us so tenderly, could she when surrounded by love, lessen her love for us?

Our dear child, innocent little Seraphine, died seventeen days after her companion in suffering. Never did death receive so gracious a welcome. She called upon it with all the tenderness of a mother, with the impatience of a child. She ardently desired to die in order to see our good God and the Blessed Virgin. Never had she been so happy as during her illness, yet she wished to die. Before going to Paradise however she desired to receive Holy Communion once more. Some minutes after midnight on Ash Wednesday of the year 1847 [February 17] Mr. Corbe brought the Blessed Sacrament to her. When she had received her Saviour, she turned toward our Father and said to him in an entreating tone, “Oh, let me go.”⁴⁶

“She died,” wrote Mother Theodore, “in possession of her God under the veils of the Sacrament and went to see Him face to face in eternity. She was buried in the same way as Sister Liguori and with the same ceremonies the Thursday after Ash Wednesday. She was twenty years and two months old. Lent had just begun for us, but for them an eternity of glory has been disclosed.”⁴⁷

In the circulars written to the Community, Mother Theodore’s grief at these first breaks in their earthly family is only too apparent, but the beautiful love and faith of their last hours consoled her. To Sister Seraphine were accorded the happiness and consolations so often given by God at death to the very young. “How well prepared Sister Seraphine is!” wrote the Foundress before she passed away. “She is so innocent, so pure, it is impossible to look upon her without feeling a heavenly consolation. She ardently desires to die especially since we have permitted her to take her [perpetual] vows.”⁴⁸ Upon Sister Saint Liguori’s death Mother Theodore recalled to the Sisters’ minds the virtues of this beloved Sister, “the youngest and the most vigorous of the six who came to found

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Annals*, Book 1, p. 377.

⁴⁷ *Diary*.

⁴⁸ *J. and L.*, p. 238.

this House, her exemplary fidelity to Rule, her charity and zeal, her perfect obedience, her devotedness, her tender piety, her courage, the candor and the happy disposition which rendered her so dear to us all, and made of her a true Daughter of Providence.”⁴⁹ Mother Theodore was convinced that the sorrows of the Community had hastened this devoted Sister’s death:

This poor child was crushed by what happened during the retreat. I believe that the pain and distress which she experienced then gave rise to this dreadful attack of consumption which threatens to carry her off so quickly to the grave. The death of this dear Sister will be a loss keenly felt by the Congregation, but she will be for me especially an irreparable loss.⁵⁰

Both these beloved Sisters who could have rendered valuable services for many years fell victims to tuberculosis, so rife on the frontier. Nowadays almost all the early methods of treating this dread malady have been rejected by science. Its cause however was both then and now in no doubt. It resulted directly from the long hours of labor, the hardships and privations, the poor and scanty food of the early missions, and it was many years before it was stamped out of the American communities. Aside from the Foundress’s grief and that of the Community, from this double loss emerged a two-fold duty: to conserve by every possible means the health of those who remained to her, and of more immediate urgency, to replace them, especially Sister Saint Liguori. To a Community numerous and well established the death of an experienced and capable local superior is a deeply felt loss, but to a small group still in its beginnings, their recent bereavement was a serious blow. As was her custom, the Foundress poured forth her heart in a long letter to Mother Mary:

The sorrow of losing these dear companions of our exile would be more bearable if I were able to replace them. But that is impossible, and last year when they thought me dying all eyes were turned upon Sister Liguori. Now on whom will they fall? Good Mother, we turn to you. After God, we have no other support upon earth, no other consolation but that which we receive from our dear superiors in France. You never write to us, but we do not doubt that you love us. . . . It is then with great confidence that we implore you to send us two or three French Sisters capable of being placed at the head of our establishments. It is impossible for us to go on without help. Our American Sisters are good and full of good will; but it is useless for us to try to make superiors of them. They understand nothing of governing others, not even of directing and regulating the temporalities of a house. Sister Mary Cecilia alone is an exception to this general rule. To be concerned with what they term business is not among the customs of the country for women no matter who they are.⁵¹

The momentous, the tragic year of 1847, the saddest in the annals of the Community had dawned and had already stricken them all by carrying away two beloved Sisters in death. During the next six months the Community was to reach the summit of its Calvary and there too with the suffering God-Man, reduced to the last extremity of hardship and humiliation, to be nailed to the cross of public ignominy. God in His

⁴⁹ Diary.

⁵⁰ A Mère Marie, 31 octobre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

mercy hid these things from them, but the ever present anxiety and apprehension were a daily torture. When after her return from Sister Saint Liguori's bedside at Madison, Mother Theodore wrote to Bishop de la Hailandière regarding the closing of the school at Saint Peter's, where the pupils had dwindled to a mere handful, he refused to recognize Mother Theodore, the unanimous choice of the Community, as superior, or to deal with a Congregation, which had, as he said, no head.

Among the manifold distresses of this painful year one of the most acute was the fear of losing Father Corbe. He had already been several times removed from his post of chaplain and Ecclesiastical Superior, but each time had managed to escape the final order to depart. We have seen that he had left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to go to Vincennes three days after Christmas, 1846, and was gone for nearly four weeks without a word or sign of life to the Community. During all these weeks of care and sorrow over the two dying patients in the infirmary this anxiety too was gnawing at the heart of the Foundress: Where was Father Corbe? On January 20, Mother Theodore wrote in the diary: "Our Reverend Mr. Corbe has been absent for more than three weeks. The cold is excessive and the roads frightful. We do not know what has become of him, and our uneasiness is extreme." Finally, on January 23 he returned. The Sisters wept for joy, for the least they had feared was that he had left the diocese and fallen ill on the way. Some were convinced that he was dead. He had, in fact, been the recipient of the most flattering marks of esteem and friendship from His Lordship but had positively refused the post of superior of the seminary intimating that if he quitted Saint Mary-of-the-Woods it would be to leave the diocese. The Bishop did not wish him to permit the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to receive the Sacraments, but Father Corbe was too upright, too saintly, and too good a theologian ever to consent thus to punish the innocent, and he persistently refused to treat them as anything other than what they were, submissive and suffering Spouses of Christ.

But would another chaplain be equally upright, equally learned, equally courageous? That uncertainty was the source of the ever-present fear that they might lose Father Corbe. In early April they had another narrow escape. March had been spent with great devotion. Special prayers and mortifications with a daily Communion by Sisters in turn led up to the feast of the great Saint Joseph, who had helped them so signally during Mother Theodore's illness of the previous year. The dedication of the month of March by special devotions to Saint Joseph was hardly known in the United States in 1847, but from this time on devotions to him during March became a regular Community practice. On the day after the Annunciation Mother Theodore went to Terre Haute, but the cold was so severe that she came home with high fever and a sort of pleurisy. At this time the dreadful sufferings of the Irish peasants from the famine of 1846, were known all over the world, and food was being sent to Ireland from Terre Haute. The next year saw the deaths from the terrible ship fever, a form of typhus, of twenty thousand immigrants upon our shores, and among the priests who lost their lives in their service was Father Charles du Merle, S.J., one of Bishop Bruté's Indiana recruits of 1836, who had joined the Jesuit order.

The last days of Lent, writes Sister Saint Francis Xavier, were passed in exercises of piety. We were making our Jubilee for unfortunate Ireland. Mother could unite only in spirit in our pious retreat, however, for a severe cold confined her to her room. On Holy Saturday morning a letter was brought from Terre Haute for Mr. Corbe. It was from Vincennes, and Mother Theodore sent it to him by Sister Olympiade after the Office.⁵²

They had recognized the Bishop's small cramped chirography. Father Corbe read the letter in Sister Olympiade's presence without comment, but they understood. He had in fact received the order to leave Saint Mary's within fifteen days.

"O my God," cried out our Mother, "You wish then to destroy our poor little Community! No, there is no more hope," and she wept as she knows how to weep. . . .

The Community was still ignorant of this new misfortune. Each one learned it from the tears of her Sisters. One after another entered Mother's room, and seeing her sorrow they said: "Alas, *Notre Père* must have received his order to leave!" When all at last were convinced of our misfortune, our courage rose. We remembered the mercies of our God. Was He not omnipotent! Could He not assist us as He had done in the past? We reproached ourselves with our diffidence and resolved to do violence to heaven by our prayers and sacrifices. Public mortifications were appointed as in times of great calamity, and each Sister was permitted to make promises. . . . One offered a headache, another a toothache. Each brought her little offering. Hardly had we begun to pray when we felt better. True, our great day of Easter was very sad, our Jubilee somber. Our Lord had said however, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," and this was our hope.⁵³

Some resolution however must be taken. Either Father Corbe must leave, or he must write his reasons to the Bishop for not doing so. He knew the point at issue. He was being forced to compel the Community to hold the election which they had escaped during the previous August. If he refused, another priest would be appointed who would deny them the Sacraments unless they would consent. Father Opperman, who was known to be the Bishop's choice, would in all probability do so. "*Notre Père* could not bring himself to do it."⁵⁴

Those who had frequent dealings with the Bishop had long since discovered that if the person who happened to be the object of his angry impetuosity could keep at a distance, then after a few days offer some conciliatory advances, the strange fickleness which was so prominent among the Bishop's characteristics could be relied upon to cause him to change his mind, and probably entirely repudiate his original decision. Mother Theodore had long observed this. Father Corbe knew it also. The point was now to try to gain time. It was nearly a year since the Bishop's retirement had been approved by the Baltimore Council. Perhaps before August, which was the only time when the missionary Sisters could be present for an election, Monseigneur himself might be replaced by another Bishop, and this, though they knew it not, was what actually was to happen. The very day that Father Corbe was debating his future procedure, a letter from Vincennes brought the information that the new

⁵² Annals, Book 1, p. 378.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

chaplain, a German priest, had actually been appointed, Father Opperman, who was still talking of leaving the diocese. Some seminarians who arrived for their holiday on Thursday of Easter week had seen him, they said, packing his trunk to take the steamboat for Terre Haute.

This is the destruction of our Community, we said. . . . Sadly and in silence we were working in our different departments when suddenly at eleven o'clock in the morning the alarming sound of the bell broke upon our ears. Rushing to the chapel we found our Mother kneeling at the Sanctuary rail. In a faltering voice she told the assembled Sisters, "Mr. Opperman has just arrived."

Sister Saint Francis Xavier describes the general consternation at the news:

Tears, prayers, and sobs arose on all sides. Some prayed aloud, others silently with hands joined, still others prostrate upon the ground. Mother left the chapel. Sister Saint Francis and Sister Angelina, thinking they could already discern the decree of death hurled against their Community, began to pronounce aloud the prayer of Mardochai.⁵⁵ Some minutes later, when our sorrow and our resignation had reached their peak, we heard a little voice coming from behind the altar, "*Ce n'est pas lui.*"⁵⁶ We had to laugh and our tears of grief gave place to tears of relief and joy. From her room Mother had seen two priests go to Father Corbe's house. She had at once concluded that one was Mr. Opperman, and the other Mr. Lalumiere accompanying him no doubt by His Lordship's order, to install him. The German priest did indeed come to Terre Haute, as the seminarians had said, but only to hear the confessions of some of his compatriots who did not speak English. The other priest who had unwittingly caused so much alarm, was en route to Indianapolis. Some days later the Bishop wrote to Father Corbe that as he seemed better disposed he could remain as superior at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.⁵⁷

The fact that Bishop de la Hailandière's resignation was under advisement at Rome had by this time gradually become known throughout the diocese. The tense and threatening atmosphere seemed redoubled however as priests and Sisters waited in cruel uncertainty for the final decision.

It is generally known here that the Bishop of Vincennes has offered his resignation to the Council, but whether it will be accepted at Rome is doubtful. The final news is awaited here from day to day. I ask nothing of the good God in this important affair except the accomplishment of His holy will. . . .

The Archbishop of Baltimore having learned that it was said that the letter your Lordship had the kindness to write to him last May had been censured or criticized by some of the Fathers of the Council, has sent me word that the rumor was absolutely false. Your letter was received by him and by his venerable colleagues with every mark of respect and veneration. Shortly after the Council, his Grace having been obliged to withdraw an orphanage from a Congregation of American Sisters, offered us not only this asylum but a handsome house near the cathedral to open a boarding school and another extensive building for a day school. . . . He has sent since then for an article on our Congregation in America to insert in the Catholic Almanac which he has printed annually. He wishes to make our Community known, and in a later letter he asks for details on the origin, progress,

⁵⁵ *Book of Esther*, chap. 13.

⁵⁶ It is not he.

⁵⁷ *Annals*, Book 1, p. 381.

and present situation of our Congregation in general, thinking this information will be useful to both Catholics and Protestants.⁵⁸

This period, the last year and a half of his incumbency when the distress and disorder in the diocese were at their peak, and especially the fourteen months after the Baltimore Council till the consecration of his successor, far from being a time of quiet waiting on Bishop de la Hailandière's part, was characterized by a redoubled restlessness and activity. He was resolved, it was known, to remain if he could. France had no longer any attraction for him, but news from Rome was still delayed. In the meantime he embarked upon another, his second building program. This was the period of work upon the seminary still domiciled in the series of connected houses across from the Cathedral rectory at Second and Church Streets on "the desirable corner lot," occupied from 1838, when it was purchased by Bishop Bruté, till 1843, by Saint Mary's Female School. The small chapel, the only one of this group of buildings which is still standing, was erected at that time and dedicated on June 9, 1847. The country home, the Bishop's palace, as it came to be called, at Highland, on an eminence on an eighty-acre site on the Petersburg Road, three miles from Vincennes, went up also during these months, erected in part from timbers from Harrison's old factory up the river which the Bishop had bought for four hundred dollars.⁵⁹

The seminarians were now under the care of the Reverend Hippolyte Du Pontavice, who had replaced Father Martin as superior of the Seminary, though continuing to minister to his parish at Washington on alternate Sundays. The Reverend Julian Benoit was the Bishop's first choice for the position, but he could not be induced to leave his now flourishing parish at Fort Wayne. Of the nineteen "seminarians" seven were children, some even of ten and eleven years. Among "us little ones," as they called themselves, who were taught by the older students, was Hubert Guthneck, Père Michel's grandson, who had been living since the age of six at Saint Mary's with Father Corbe. The seminarians' free time had been employed all summer in remodeling the grounds in the rear of the seminary building in which the Bishop had made such notable additions and alterations. The roof had been raised giving space for a room for each of the older students, and the frame portion of the series was rebuilt in brick and united by a porch to the other structures. A belfry rose above the central section, and the north end on Church Street where the kitchen and refectory were located was balanced by the new chapel at the south. The seminarians thought it a *belle maison*.⁶⁰ In many expeditions to the woods they had brought back the young trees to beautify the grounds in the rear of the buildings and the shrubbery to be planted as hedges. A semi-circular avenue which encircled the yard was also the work of the students.

The chapel in which, after its completion and dedication on June 9, 1847, they had Mass daily, was an entirely new structure. "The interior of the new chapel is indeed charming. The roof or ceiling is arched, and

⁵⁸ A Mgr. Bouvier, 26 novembre, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁹ Reverend Ernest Audran à Very Reverend A. Martin, 10 août, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁰ Philip Doyle to Very Reverend A. Martin, April 23, 1847. S.M.W.A.

the end wherein the altar is placed is semi-circular as in the Cathedral . . . the windows are of painted glass; the two sides of the interior are adorned with six beautiful pictures and the altar with two small but beautiful statues."⁶¹ William Doyle, who was now almost ready for ordination, gives a similar description to Father Martin. It is placed here as an evidence of the bilingual character of the American clergy and Sisters of the diocese at this time. The Alsatians using three languages and specially needed to minister to the German immigrants who were pouring into Indiana, were also of considerable numbers, counting Fathers Hamion, Fischer, Weinzoepflen, Munschina, and Rudolph, and among the Sisters, Sister Marie Joseph Pardeillan and the daughters of Père Michel Guthneck, Sister Therese, Sister Martha, and Sister Michel, all of whom were born in Alsace, though their nieces, Sister Pierolina and Sister Mary Charles, named also for her father, were born at Sainte Marie.

. . . il y aura de la place assez pour quarante élèves avec une chapelle qui excite l'admiration des MM. et des dames de Vincennes qui l'ont visitée et louée à l'excès. . . L'ensemble est très-joli, les ornements, un autel modeste dans un petit sanctuaire semi-circulaire et surmonté d'une statue de la Sainte Vierge, petite et illuminée du toit en haut par une petite croisée, le toit en forme de voûte . . . les vitres colorés, et dix [sic] tableaux de grandeurs différentes sur les murailles.⁶²

At this time Highland was not completed. It was to this house that Bishop de la Hailandière had planned to retire and from there to supervise the temporalities of the diocese after the arrival of the new Bishop. He spent much time and thought upon both seminary localities, all in ignorance of the fact that he was preparing spacious and comfortable quarters for the Sisters of Providence and their pupils who were to leave their ramshackle yellow house on Fifth and Market Streets to occupy the rebuilt seminary before the passage of another year. Before another five years they were also occupying the "palace" at Highland with the orphans.

The last and most painful phase of the Community's long purification was now at hand. Mother Theodore knew and felt it, but terrified as she could not but be, she prepared prayerfully and in complete resignation to the Will of God for the usual yearly visitation of the missions. This point of Rule was almost sure to bring about a new tempest of difficulties with the Bishop. A crisis was at hand however also in the troubled history of the diocese of Vincennes, and after deeply shadowed days of humiliation and suffering, peace and security for the Community were about to dawn at last. Sister Saint Francis Xavier's record in the Annals is our only source of information upon these tragic weeks, from April 19, when the Foundress left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods with Sister Mary Xavier, till June 10, when she returned. Her soul was sorrowful even unto death on her departure, and the Sisters saw her go, so frail and anxious, with trepidation and alarm. Painful and crushing presentiments weighed on them all.

Her itinerary included Jasper, Madison, Vincennes, and Fort Wayne, although she had visited the last mission when she installed the found-

⁶¹ John B. Devine to Very Reverend A. Martin, June 22, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁶² William Doyle à Very Reverend A. Martin, 29 juin, 1847. S.M.W.A.

resses there after the retreat. Saint Peter's had been closed during the previous September. Fort Wayne on account of its distance was visited first. Then the Foundress took the slow canal trip to Cincinnati, going thence by steamboat on the Ohio to Madison. The visit to Madison was painful not only to Mother Theodore but not less so to Sister Mary Xavier and to the Madison Sisters. Their grief at the loss of Sister Saint Liguori was still acute, and when they all met for the first time tears flowed afresh. Except Mother Theodore no one had been closer to Sister Mary Xavier⁶³ than Sister Liguori from the day when, accompanied by their pastor and confessor, Father Hardy, they had arrived from their home in Fougères at the novitiate at Ruillé together. Sister Mary Celeste had been with Sister Liguori from the first troubled days at Madison, had nursed her devotedly, and had accompanied her on her last journey home to die. Sister Augustine, too, had shared with Sister Liguori the destitution and hardships of Saint Francisville and Saint Peter's. All the Sisters, therefore, were anxious for details on the last moments of their dear superior, and Mother Theodore, despite her grief, loved to speak of this cherished daughter. Hearing her, the Sisters "wept over their good and courageous superior, over the sorrows of their Mother, and over the Community to which by her premature death God had dealt so heavy a blow."⁶⁴

⁶³ Though her name was Sister Mary Xavier, she was generally known as Sister Mary.

⁶⁴ *Annals*, p. 53.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CRISIS

"Hail crosses, great and small, spiritual and temporal, interior and exterior! I kiss your feet unworthy as I am of your shadow."

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

Often quoted by MOTHER THEODORE

DID Mother Theodore suspect that her arrival in Vincennes on May 18, 1847, marked the beginning of the end? She may have foreseen it, and Father Corbe certainly before she left Saint Mary's had feared the worst. In the letter from him which was awaiting her at Vincennes he wrote, "Your letter seemed so sad. You were ill doubtless, or else you feared the coming storm. But no matter what happens, provided that the thunderbolt leaves you with a cent's worth of life, come back, and no matter with what anathemas you may be charged, we will receive you with joy."¹ When His Lordship had twice refused to see her and this circumstance had been adversely commented upon in the town, Mother Theodore made a third attempt, and this time it was successful. She had engaged their places in the stage and had written to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods announcing their departure for the next day, May 20. It was already late when Mother Theodore presented herself alone before the Bishop for the final and fatal interview, the culmination of their checkered relations.

She was met with a tempest of reproaches, among them that of writing against him to the Baltimore Council, a statement which was palpably untrue. He brought up again the question of an election for superior general, which the Community had evaded at the time of the previous retreat. Father Corbe had expected this and had advised Mother Theodore to refer the matter to the decision of the Community. She had been given to them on their departure from France not only as superior general but also as Foundress to govern the Community until it was solidly established. The Community, still in its infancy, did not yet have the number of professed required by the Rule to constitute the general chapter which is the proper electoral body. Only one Sister had the ten years profession of perpetual vows required by the French Rule for the office of superior general.² They could keep the Rule regarding the triennial election of a superior only by infringing upon a dozen other Rules. The Bishop knew all this, but nothing daunted, he was returning again to his former position. Mother Theodore's gentle answers had no effect upon him, and at last in a tone of bitter severity the Bishop passed his final sentence upon her. "*Eh bien*, I forbid you to return to Saint Mary's. I deprive you of all your rights of superiorship. I dispense you from your vows while you are in Indiana, and I forbid you to have, even by letter, any communication

¹ 17 mai, 1847. S.M.W.A.

² Rule of 1835, p. 6.

with the Sisters of Providence at Saint Mary's." For more than a quarter of an hour he continued to pour forth reproaches. "After a moment of reflection," wrote Mother Theodore, "I knelt down, and begging Monseigneur to pardon me the faults of my administration. I asked his blessing and said goodbye, assuring him of my submission."³ He turned the key upon her and went off to his dinner leaving her there till the uneasy Sisters came to look for her.

The final blow had fallen. She was deposed, dismissed from her Congregation, forbidden to return to Saint Mary's, or to communicate with the Sisters. The tradition in the Community has always been that she was also excommunicated. This does not appear from her own account, but no doubt the Sisters took it for granted that the Bishop's oft repeated threat had materialized at last. She returned to the old yellow house with a breaking heart. The worst had now come. For no fault of hers, but for her constancy and fidelity to the Rule she had vowed to observe, she could now taste the bittersweet of Our Lord's words: "Blessed are ye when they shall persecute you and revile you and speak all that is evil against you untruly for My sake; rejoice and be glad, for your reward is very great in heaven."

Handing over to Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer and to Sister Mary Xavier the keys, the money, and papers she had in her possession, she kept only a small sum, enough to enable her to go forth alone from the diocese. As according to the Bishop's words she could no longer give any directions whatever, she asked Sister Mary Xavier to go on the morrow to Saint Mary's to let Father Corbe and the Sisters know what had happened. As it was now very late, they all retired, but the limit of Mother Theodore's endurance had been reached. In her fragile health, suffering for nearly a month from a heavy cold, she was already worn out when she reached Vincennes from seven hundred miles of travel on the primitive conveyances and the river and canal boats of the period. Anxiety as to the fate of the Community now broke down her frail resistance, and an attack of pleurisy speedily brought her to the portals of death. Next morning Dr. Baty found her condition alarming, and two days later she was thought to be dying. She wished to receive the Sacraments, the greatest solace and assistance of every distressed soul. The Sisters sent for the vicar general⁴ to hear her confession, but he refused to come. A dreadful fear beset her. Would she be left to die without the consolations of religion? At midnight, as she continued to grow worse, some one was sent for Father Audran, the Bishop's nephew, ordained the previous year, and he consented to come to hear her confession.

This was no doubt the supreme hour of her life. Dying, poor, proscribed, almost homeless, and a stranger in the very house of her own Community where she was an unwelcome burden, she hailed with relief her last hour which seemed to be rapidly approaching. "I was happy to die," she wrote later, "for it seemed to me that only thus could the Congregation be saved from total ruin." The Bishop had said that if a single Sister tried to follow her from the diocese he would excommunicate that

³ A Mgr. Bouvier, 8 juillet, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁴ Father DuPontavice.



SISTER SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER
IRMA LE FER DE LA MOTTE
1816-1856

"Few have been favored with
such heavenly gifts as she en-
joyed."

*From a Daguerreotype at
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods*



SISTER MARY JOSEPH
ELVIRE LE FER DE LA MOTTE
1825-1881

"God seemed from the first to
have had very special designs
upon her."

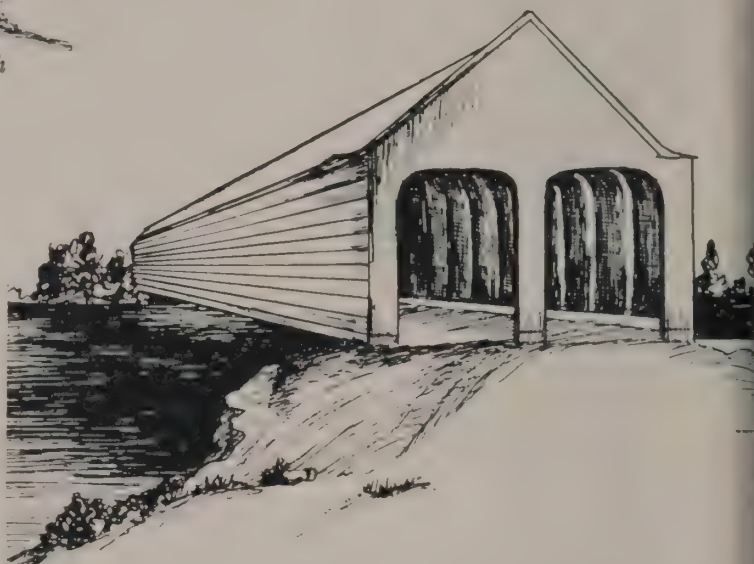
From an Early French Photograph



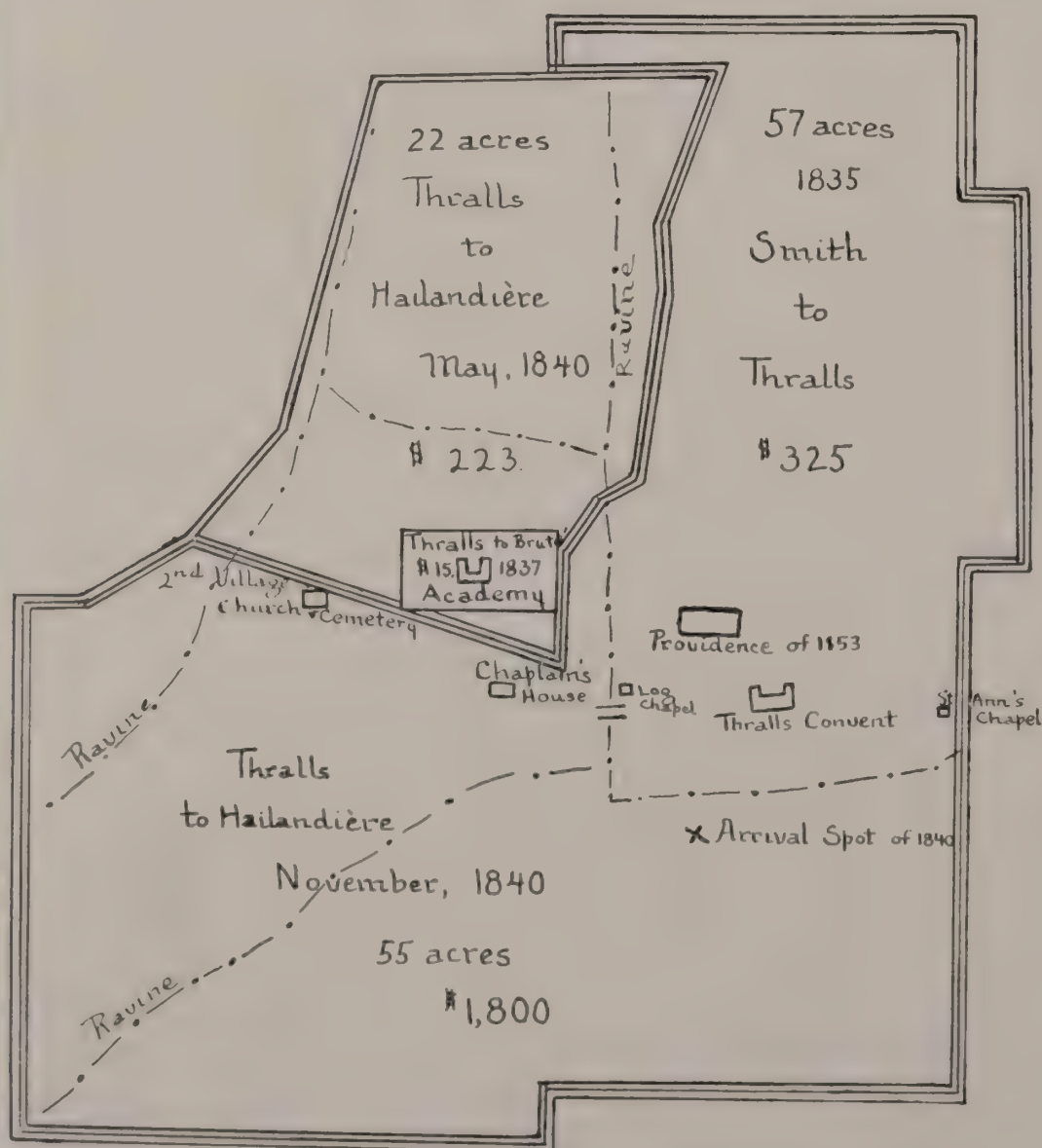
Drawn by Sister Georgiana from Sister Maurice's Sketch

THE BRIDGE OF THE ACCIDENT
A typical pioneer bridge without a parapet twelve feet above a deep ravine.

**THE FIRST BRIDGE OVER THE WABASH
AT TERRE HAUTE**
An old-fashioned wooden covered bridge.



*Drawn by Sister Georgiana from a Pencil Sketch
by Sister Saint Francis Xavier*



**SAINT
MARY-OF-THE-WOODS
IN MOTHER THEODORE'S
TIME**

Bounded on the East by Saint Anne's; on the West by Guerin Ravine; on the South by Le Fer Hall; on the North by the Vineyards.

Drawn by Sister Camille from Data by Sister Mary Borromeo

Sister immediately, and poor timorous Sister Saint Vincent actually feared the ban would fall upon her for keeping the dying Foundress under her roof. Father Corbe made a secret night journey to Vincennes to administer the sacraments and after about five days of intense moral and physical suffering she began to get better, and in accordance with the Bishop's command commenced to formulate a plan to leave the diocese secretly. But where could she go, without money, friendless, so weak still that she could not sit up for a quarter of an hour? If she attempted even to read a letter or to apply her mind to any serious matter, her temperature rose at once alarmingly. Anxiety was still killing her.

Meanwhile at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods consternation greeted Sister Mary Xavier's return alone, the bearer of the dreadful news that their Mother had been driven from the Community and the diocese, and as they thought, excommunicated. Father Corbe had received a letter from the Bishop arranging for an election to replace their absent and dying Mother, but the thoughts and desires of all clung irrevocably to Mother Theodore. "You are aware of my personal opinion," said Father Corbe to Sister Saint Francis Xavier. "Nevertheless we must know the dispositions of the Community." The bell was rung, and all assembled in "Mother's room" where they declared their unanimous resolution to reject any attempt at an election, to adhere to their absent, proscribed, and suffering Mother, and to follow her wherever she would go. Sister Saint Francis Xavier took charge. She met the postulants and told them weeping of the dreadful straits to which the Community was reduced. The Bishop's threat, excommunication for any Sister who left the diocese without his permission, was made plain but they too expressed their determination to remain with the Community and to join it in its emigration with its rightfully constituted superior general. To Father Corbe's great consolation, not one hesitated. The workmen led by Père Michel acquiesced also in the general resolution to leave Saint Mary's at once. A letter was immediately drawn up, signed by the professed Sisters and dispatched by the gardener, Jean Delahaye, on horseback to Vincennes to Mother Theodore, "our faithful Jean," as Sister Saint Francis Xavier calls him.

Packing of trunks began and preparations for the journey. But where? They had now no money. All the funds from France had been sunk in the new building suddenly become useless overnight. Sister Saint Francis wrote in haste to Archbishop Eccleston, to the French superiors, and to their devoted friend Father de Saint-Palais at Madison of the terrible catastrophe which had overtaken the Community and of their hasty preparations to leave Indiana following their persecuted superior.

In Vincennes illness and grief still bound Mother Theodore to her bed in Sister Saint Vincent's unwilling house. Gradually withdrawn again from the brink of death, she saw she must be resigned still to live and suffer longer. The letters of sympathy brought by Jean from every Sister at Saint Mary's assuring her of their loyalty to her as their Mother and of their determination to let nothing prevent them from following her wherever she went were followed by similar protestations from all the missions. At Saint Mary's hourly supplications were mounting to heaven for her. General penance and prayer as in times of public distress were arranged. The relics of Saint Urban were exposed and pilgrimages begun to

Our Lady of the Washhouse, a little shrine in the log house on the brook which ran down the ravine where the Community washing was done. This pilgrimage Sister Olympiade wished to make on her knees, but this Sister Saint Francis Xavier forbade as no one could descend the ravine in that position. Instead, this good Sister was sent from Saint Mary's to give the Foundress the benefit of her experienced and careful nursing.

Sister Mary Cecilia accompanied her to watch over the patient, to prevent her from leaving Vincennes, and to take her back, as soon as she was able to travel, to their forest home. To this Mother Theodore persistently refused to agree without the Bishop's permission, although Father Corbe had written that since the Bishop had remitted all her vows she could, like the ordinary faithful, go wherever she wished.⁵ She was determined to obey the Bishop nevertheless, praying night and day to God not to permit her to go to Saint Mary's to carry maledictions and excommunications. Matters remained in the same dreadful impasse. The Community had written to the Bishop their determination to adhere to their Mother, and Father Corbe sent in his resignation as Ecclesiastical Superior at the same time. The beloved month of Mary was almost at its close, but hoping against hope the suffering Foundress continued to turn with fullest confidence to the Heavenly Mother who had never yet failed her. It was the thirtieth day of May.⁶

Dr. Baty had not yet permitted anyone to speak to Mother Theodore except her nurse, Sister Olympiade, and a few of the Sisters, and her extreme weakness made it impossible for her to do otherwise than observe his orders. Now, however, Father Bellier, the Eudist President of Saint Gabriel's College, came to the convent and begged to see her if only for a few moments saying that he had important news from France to communicate. She may have suspected something, but in any case she admitted him and "that poor Father," she wrote, "who has been suspended for a year, told me that the Bishop was to be removed."⁷ He showed her a passage in a letter just received from Rennes quoting the Pope's words to the Eudist Superior, Father Louis de Rennes, "I have accepted the resignation of the Bishop of Vincennes and have named his successor." Father Bellier had received letters from three priests from France in the same mail, from Fathers Vabret and Chassé of his own order, and from Father Hardy, an old friend of Mother Theodore, and of many of the Indiana missionaries.

Alerding gives additional details. Father Chassé, who had replaced Father Bellier at the head of Saint Gabriel's College while he was in Mobile, had now been in Europe in the interest of the college since the previous September, and accompanying the superior general, Father Louis, he had spent some months in Rome. At a private audience with the Holy Father, Pius IX said to him, "You are the little priest from Indiana. I will tell you good news; I have named a Bishop for Vincennes. The papers are signed there on my table."⁸ The news was startling but not to be doubted for a moment. Discretion was, of course, imperative. Mother Theodore permitted Sister Mary Cecilia to communicate with Father

⁵ 21 mai, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁶ A Mère Marie, 25 juin, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Alerding, *History of Vincennes Diocese*, p. 450.

Corbe and Sister Saint Francis Xavier at Saint Mary's, but otherwise no word was said.

Not till nearly a week later, on June 5, did Bishop de la Hailandière receive the letter from his brother Joseph in Rome which was his first news of his replacement, giving also the name of his successor, Very Reverend John Stephen Bazin, Vicar General of the diocese of Mobile. No official notification came however for some time, a circumstance not then unusual owing to the slow mails and delays of the period. Bishop-elect Bazin heard at once from Propaganda but did not receive at Mobile the official bulls from Rome announcing his appointment to the see of Vincennes till September 3.

Towards the end of June came the first of a series of communications between the retiring Bishop of Vincennes and his successor.⁹ Monseigneur Bazin wrote of his surprise and his hesitations, asking as a special favor all the information possible in writing on the situation at Vincennes and naming Father Hippolyte DuPontavice to continue in his post of vicar general. The receipt of this letter not a month after Father Bellier had received the first news and three weeks after Monseigneur de la Hailandière had heard from Rome from his brother, motivated no doubt another of the Bishop's admonitory letters to the Roman authorities:

It is a fact that for months those of whom I have the greatest cause to complain in the diocese know and relate everything in such a way that everyone around me and in my diocese says publicly that I am no longer Bishop. They name my successor and even add that after his arrival I am to remain in the diocese. The communications with this sort of persons have been so numerous that in a letter which I have in my possession the confessor of the Community of Sisters which I founded at my expense expresses astonishment not only that he has been written to but even that his name is known among personages so lofty.¹⁰

These words can refer to no one but Father Corbe, but in the records of these trying days when every scrap of correspondence was saved, there is no hint that he addressed a line to the Bishop. In his procedure in these final circumstances as so often before, the Bishop was not correct in citing Church Law upon his position, and a courteous but unmistakable letter from Bishop Portier of Mobile proved to him from the Canons of Benedict XIV that his jurisdiction in the diocese had ceased from the moment he had received reliable news that Rome had accepted his resignation. Rome confirmed this fact by immediately addressing all communications to the Bishop-elect¹¹ and by ordering him to issue the customary *exeat* or honorable dismissal to Father Buteux, which Bishop de la Hailandière had withheld for two years.

During the week succeeding Father Bellier's fateful visit on May 30, Mother Theodore remained a convalescent guest of her still terrified and unwilling hostess, Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, in the Bishop's old yellow house at Fifth and Market Streets, still guarded by Sister Mary Cecilia and nursed lovingly and devotedly by faithful Sister Olympiade. At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods everyone knew of her plight, but in Vincennes, where only the three eldest Sisters had been informed, no one else seems to have

⁹ 26 juin, 1847. N.D.U.A.

¹⁰ A un Cardinal non nommé, 26 juin, 1847. [Rough draft] N.D.U.A.

¹¹ 22 juillet, 1847. N.D.U.A.

suspected the truth. This time no echoes escaped from the Bishop's dining-room. "The Mother Superior was here very ill for two weeks," wrote one of the seminarians to Father Martin.¹² Even the young Sisters in the house were kept in total ignorance of what had happened, and Mother Theodore's grief was intensified by their innocent remarks about the happiness of the Sisters at Saint Mary's when she would be able to return entirely recovered. She still persisted in her determination to obey the Bishop and in her refusal to go back without his permission despite the pleading of the Sisters. Dr. Baty suspected some trouble with His Lordship which was preventing her complete recovery, and he also began to urge her to go.

The Bishop, too, now that he knew that a change was imminent, may have begun to reflect upon the injustice and illegality of his recent procedure toward Mother Theodore. Bishop Bouvier had given her the counsel which had guided her in this, the most difficult circumstance of her life: "If the Bishop commands, he must be obeyed. The subject may be discussed later on if necessary." Thus to punish and publicly degrade an innocent person was an indefensible act. Despite his natural despotic character, his Gallican tendency to exaggerate his powers, and his early training in the severities of French civil law, the Bishop as the days went by may have begun to realize that his position was untenable. The Community at Saint Mary's knew that he had gone far beyond his rights in his treatment of their beloved Mother, and that in consequence they were not obliged to obey him. They had Father Corbe's counsel and encouragement in this dark hour. A few days later His Lordship sent his nephew, Father Audran, to speak to the Sisters about submission to authority, and at last he saw Mother Theodore in person. "He proposed such absurdities for the religious life that even Sister Olympiade could answer him. I tried very delicately to show him that he was not well informed in this matter, and I cited respected authorities to him. I do not think the good young priest will return to the charge."¹³

Bishop Bouvier's words to Father Corbe, which had guided the Community in this crisis in their affairs were as follows:

I. En permettant aux Sœurs de quitter le Diocèse de Vincennes, si absolument elles ne peuvent y tenir, je n'ai entendu parler que de celles qui ont fait profession dans mon Diocèse et nous appartiennent. Elles peuvent aussi revenir à Ruillé, leur Maison-mère si elles le désirent ainsi que nous le leur avons dit plusieurs fois. Celles qui ont fait profession en Amérique ne nous appartiennent point, et je n'ai aucune autorité sur elles; je ne puis donc leur commander ni leur défendre. Mais comme Théologien je ne balance point à dire qu'elles ne sont tenues en vertu de leurs vœux que selon les constitutions selon lesquelles elles ont entendu faire leur profession. Monseigneur de Vincennes ne peut donc exiger d'elles qu'elles les abandonnent pour en suivre d'autres, ou pour n'en suivre aucune, et être dirigées d'une manière arbitraire; sans doute elles pourraient consentir à subir des modifications sous la direction du dit Evêque, mais elles ne peuvent y être contraintes par aucune peine canonique. S'il devenait impossible de suivre ce qu'elles ont entendu s'imposer par leurs vœux, rien ne les empêcherait donc d'aller ailleurs aussi bien que les professes de Ruillé.

¹² Thomas Monaghan, June 22, 1847. S.M.W.A.

¹³ A Mère Marie, 25 juin, 1847. S.M.W.A.

II. Par ce que je viens de dire vous voyez à mon avis Monseigneur de Vincennes ne peut empêcher en usant de peines canoniques nos Sœurs de Ruillé d'aller s'établir ailleurs, dès qu'il leur refuse constamment ce qu'elles ont le droit de demander : la liberté de suivre leurs constitutions et la propriété de leur établissement.¹⁴

Translation: I. In permitting the Sisters to leave the diocese of Vincennes, if they absolutely cannot stay there, I meant only those who made their profession in my diocese and who belong to us. They can thus return to Ruillé, their motherhouse, if they desire as we have told them several times. Those who made their profession in America do not belong to us at all, and I have no authority over them; therefore, I cannot command nor forbid them. But as a theologian, I do not hesitate at all to say that in virtue of their vows they are bound only in accordance with the Constitutions as they understood them when they made their profession. The Bishop of Vincennes cannot then require them to abandon them [the Constitutions] to follow others or to follow none, and to be governed in an arbitrary way; undoubtedly they could consent to submit to some modifications under the direction of the said Bishop, but they cannot be constrained thereto by any canonical penalty. If it would become impossible to follow what they understood they were imposing upon themselves by their vows, nothing would then hinder them from going elsewhere as well as the Sisters from Ruillé.

II. By what I have just said you see that in my opinion the Bishop of Vincennes cannot hinder by using canonical penalties, our Sisters of Ruillé from going to establish themselves elsewhere, since he refuses constantly what they have the right to ask: the liberty of following their Constitutions and the ownership of their establishment. (Translation by Sister Gertrude Smith.)

The Bishop now handed a letter to the Sisters for the Community giving them over entirely to their Ecclesiastical Superior and renouncing all his rights over them. In any case his jurisdiction in the diocese was now at an end. His letter was further deemed a release for Mother Theodore. "It seemed to me that Providence had intervened and that I could now return to Saint Mary's," she wrote,¹⁵ though Father Corbe and others had assured her that as she had been reduced to the status of the ordinary faithful she could have gone earlier. She was so weak, however, that she had to be carried on board the steamboat. In thirty hours she was at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, rescued by the mercy of God from the abyss into which injustice and cruelty had plunged her. "The hand of God was there, and the Master said 'You shall go no further.' We have not yet the certainty that His Lordship will not remain. The news from Rome is not official. His Lordship has said that he is not to leave the diocese. . . . As for myself, I have perfect confidence that God will come again to our assistance for there is no imperfection in His works."¹⁶

After a quick and uneventful trip up the river on the *Daniel Boone*, she arrived on the tenth of June at six o'clock in the evening of a fine summer day. The lovely forest home which she had thought never to see again was a verdant bower. Every tree and shrub and flower was at its best, and the birds were twittering and singing in the thick woods around their convent. Their Mother was received by the Community with all the enthusiasm and tenderness that love could suggest. Father Lalumiere had the cannon fired at Terre Haute, and a volley of gun shots from the workmen announced the approach of the wagon. Mother Theodore was met

¹⁴ A. M. J. Corbe, cited by Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Archbishop Eccleston, May 31, 1847. Original in Baltimore Cathedral Archives.

¹⁵ A Mgr. Bouvier, 8 juillet, 1847. S.M.W.A.

¹⁶ A Mère Marie, 25 juin, 1847. S.M.W.A.

by a procession of Sisters and postulants, Father Lalumiere wearing a white scarf, on horseback at its head. The people of the countryside and the employees on the farm joined in the general rejoicing. Sister Basilide and her pupils of the academy brought up the rear with Taillard bounding and barking about them for joy. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament given by Father Corbe in the chapel closed this never-to-be-forgotten day of rejoicing.

The summer passed away peacefully. "We are hoping," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Bishop Bouvier, "that our poor Congregation after tempests so many and so great will at last enjoy a little peace."¹⁷ The crisis was past. Others later thought and said that they had saved the Community for Indiana, but God alone had saved it. If the news of Bishop de la Hailandière's removal had come one month later, Mother Theodore must have gone from Indiana, and the Community would have followed her. As no other priest was appointed for the retreat, Father Corbe preached it, Father Lalumiere assisting as confessor. On the feast of the Assumption Sister Marie Joseph pronounced her perpetual vows, and Sister Philomene, Sister Lucy, Sister Mary Margaret, Sister Mary Therese, Sister Lawrence, Sister Monique, and Sister Joachim took for the first time the four vows still customary for many years in the Congregation. Three postulants received the religious habit, Sister Maria, Sister Saint Urbain, and Sister Bonaventure. The Reverend Julian Benoit assisted Father Corbe and Father Lalumiere in the ceremonies, and left a few days later for Fort Wayne with the four Sisters destined for that mission, the three who had opened the house the previous year, Sister Mary Magdalen, Sister Catherine, and Sister Caroline, and an additional teacher, Sister Mary Therese Delahaye, who had accompanied Mother Theodore from France in 1843 and who had just been professed. Sister Mary Celeste, Sister Mary Margaret, and Sister Michel returned to Madison with Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer as superior.

Vincennes was a source of anxiety as the probability that the Bishop would substitute another order for the Sisters of Providence was still in the air. Sister Augustine, whose health had been a subject of concern ever since the years at Saint Francisville and Saint Peter's, had been at death's door with an attack of fever, and she was unable to leave with Sister Bonaventure on August 25 for Jasper where she was to be superior of the little establishment of only two Sisters. Sister Marie Joseph had been appointed superior at Vincennes, but in the uncertainty about the future of that house, Mother Theodore sent her temporarily to Jasper till Sister Augustine would be able to travel. The two Sisters set out in a carriage which Mother Theodore had hired for them at fifty cents a day. At last Sister Gabriella, who had been at Vincennes the previous year, and Sister Anastasie, who was still a novice, left for Vincennes, with Sister Mary Xavier to replace the superior, Sister Marie Joseph, who had fallen very ill at Jasper, until she was able to take charge. Sister Mary Xavier soon found the disturbing atmosphere of Vincennes too much for her prudence and courage, and in response to her urging Mother Theodore decided to send Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Vincennes as temporary local superior.

¹⁷ 16 octobre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

Before she left Saint Mary's a letter arrived from Mother Mary in answer to the distressed communication Sister Saint Francis had sent to Ruillé on Sister Mary Xavier's return alone from Vincennes on May 21, when Mother Theodore was ill after her last tragic interview with the Bishop on the previous day. Bishop Bouvier had learned from a reliable source at Paris that Monseigneur de la Hailandière's successor had been appointed and that the bearer of the bulls had sailed from Havre on June 15. Mother Mary's long letter which communicated this intelligence, was filled with the maternal advice and encouragement so urgently needed by the harassed Community. Taking it for granted that they were all excommunicated, she wrote accordingly:

Monseigneur has communicated to us . . . the letter in which you announce not only the deposition of Sister Theodore and her unmerited dismissal from the society which she had founded with the help of God but even her expulsion from the diocese of Vincennes. All this is very hard to accept and equally hard to understand. God has permitted it nevertheless to try your faith in Divine Providence. . . . He will restore your Mother to you if indeed she is not already given back to you by means of the saintly man named by the Holy Father to replace your present Bishop.

Thus you perceive that at the very moment when you thought all was lost, God was arranging your deliverance. This God of goodness and mercy has witnessed all your sorrows, counted your tears, heard your groans and prayers. He is pleased with your sacrifices and your patience. But do not glory in this, my dear daughter. Be on the contrary more humble, more obedient, for if the wind of pride shatters the cedars and the mighty oaks in your Indiana forest, what should you not fear who are but weak reeds?¹⁸

Bishop Bouvier's advice communicated by Mother Mary at his request was again for Mother Theodore to remain at her post notwithstanding the anathema hurled against her by Bishop de la Hailandière:

. . . which after all cannot last long. By doing so you will add to your crown bearing formally though guiltlessly the weight of an unjust excommunication. Let Sister Theodore then remain in Indiana, and if from some necessity she is obliged to leave your house for some days, let her not go far from her little flock. She will govern it later in peace and security, as I feel that the new Bishop will do her justice. . . . The event of the removal of the Bishop of Vincennes together with the crosses you have suffered since you are in that country make me confident that God will bless your mission. Be then full of courage, patience, and hope, since to you also it has been given to know how much we must suffer for the glory of the Holy Name of Jesus. I shall await a letter from you with impatience in order to know the issue of your momentous affairs.

I have already told you that our Right Reverend Prelate is at Paris. His health is good, and he is always most devoted to you. He has great compassion for you and wishes it were in his power to be useful to you. But what could he do to help you? If letters could be banned, those of our Prelate would be excommunicated in Indiana.¹⁹

The status of affairs in the episcopal city remained unchanged. Only on July 18 had the Community received officially the news of the appointment of the Very Reverend John Stephen Bazin, Vicar General of

¹⁸ A Sister Saint Francis Xavier, 8 juillet, 1847. S.M.W.A.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the diocese of Mobile, to the see of Indiana. Bishop de la Hailandière was, however, fully convinced that his authority was still supreme in the diocese till the consecration of the new Bishop. Accordingly the restless activity which was his principal characteristic continued to reach out in every direction. He insisted that he was to remain permanently in charge of the temporalities in the diocese, building, purchasing church sites, making improvements of all sorts, leaving the spiritualities to the new Bishop. As the weeks went by Monseigneur de la Hailandière grew less and less inclined to leave Indiana. France had no attraction for him as we have seen. His resignation had been only a gesture designed to enlist the sympathy and support of his brother Bishops in his difficulties as had been the case in 1843, and he now openly acknowledged he had not intended it to be accepted.²⁰ "Traitors have plotted against me," he said. "I did not give in my resignation in a manner to be accepted." Rumors were flying through the diocese to the effect that the new Bishop would alter nothing, that Bishop de la Hailandière's views, plans, and authority would continue unchanged. This report was even printed in the newspapers in Vincennes²¹ and it filled the hearts of the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods with something akin to terror.

During the last weeks of September, just after the Sisters had arrived at Vincennes, a last letter to Father Corbe in the Bishop's small cramped handwriting ordered him in two or three brief lines to come to Vincennes at once to clear himself of calumnies concerning him, "if indeed they are calumnies." Worried and fatigued, the good priest left Terre Haute on September 22 expecting to be removed again from his post of superior of the Community. When he reached Vincennes, he learned that such indeed was to be the case, and that Father Opperman had again been named chaplain. Father Corbe had however by this time decided to await the arrival of Monseigneur Bazin before making any change or leaving his post, and he returned at once to Saint Mary's. To Bishop de la Hailandière's repeated later suggestions that Father Corbe be appointed superior of the seminary at Vincennes, Bishop Bazin returned a repeated negative answer saying that he had not come to Indiana to afflict the Sisters by robbing them of their devoted Father.

In the meantime Sister Saint Francis Xavier beset by hourly anxieties was in charge in the Bishop's yellow house at Fifth and Market Streets in Vincennes. The Sisters now knew [September 26]²² that Bishop-elect Bazin accompanied by Monseigneur Portier, Bishop of Mobile, was to leave there on October 4 for Vincennes. Among Bishop de la Hailandière's numerous activities at this time was a series of repairs upon the ramshackle yellow house for the Sisters who were to replace the Sisters of Providence, and among his proposals of this year had been the consolidation of the two religious communities of Holy Cross and Providence with a consequent change of constitutions and of dress, setting aside the white fichu worn at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. "This would take away your title of superior and founder," he wrote to Father Sorin, "but frankly I think that experience must have brought home to you that it would be an

²⁰ Benoit à Martin, 14 octobre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

²¹ A Mère Marie, 26 septembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

²² *Ibid.*

advantage for you.”²³ The day after he received his brother’s letter announcing his removal he wrote again to Father Sorin, “I have been thinking a great deal of your Sisters, and if they had been in this vicinity I would perhaps have offered them Vincennes, or still more, have invited them to prepare to take possession of Saint Mary’s and its fine buildings.”²⁴

These projects had gradually become known to the Sisters of Providence who trembled from hour to hour expecting each one to be their last in Vincennes. Every free moment of the day and parts of the night were spent in prayer supplicating God to help them through the Holy Angels to whom there has always been among the Sisters of Providence an earnest and unfailing devotion. The Bishop had in fact ordered Sister Saint Francis Xavier to write to Mother Theodore his determination to dismiss the Sisters, but how could she send this crushing news to her poor Mother at Saint Mary’s, who had so lately been through such dreadful afflictions? She therefore delayed, and again their prayers triumphed, for next day the Bishop’s mind had changed, and a little more time was gained.

The atmosphere of fear and distress continued however to grow worse as the days went by. The afternoon of Monseigneur Bazin’s arrival, October 14, seemed the lowest ebb of their sorrows. Jeannette, Bishop de la Hailandière’s servant, had just brought during Vespers a letter of bitter reproof to Sister Saint Francis Xavier from Monseigneur returning also the drawings of the Cathedral, the library, and the seminary she had made and had given him. To her now all seemed lost and the Community dispersed. On leaving, Jeannette had told them that the new Bishop had just arrived quietly and almost unnoticed in the city. Only before the tabernacle at the Cathedral, they felt, could they find solace. Sobbing, they went along the street, all four Sisters, Sister Saint Francis, Sister Mary Xavier, Sister Gabriella, and Sister Anastasie. On passing the Bishop’s house, Sister Saint Francis Xavier said suddenly, “Let us go in. We are all four here together.” They knocked and to their consternation both Bishops appeared at the door. Above and behind the kindly face of Bishop Bazin appeared the terrifying countenance of Monseigneur de la Hailandière. They knelt to receive the new Bishop’s blessing, and taking them to the parlor he greeted them so graciously and spoke so kindly that their tears gradually gave place to timid smiles of hope. He had heard, he said, of their painful situation from Father Corbe and from Father Deydier, who had traveled with him from Evansville. “I know something about your affairs. Do not fear,” said the Bishop. “All will go well. Reassure your good Mother in your next letter.” These, with many other words of encouragement and hope, sent them home to spend the rest of the day in thanksgiving for this visit, for which, as Sister Saint Francis said, she had recited so many *Veni Creators*, so many *Paters* and *Aves*. She tells us that afterwards, they laid aside their wraps, and in true French fashion, embraced and kissed one another laughing and crying.

Next day the new Bishop came to see them, the first visit he made in Vincennes. “To comprehend the happiness, the astonishment and gratitude of our Sisters on hearing the first words of Monseigneur Bazin, one

²³ 6 mars, 1847. N.D.U.A.

²⁴ 6 juin, 1847. N.D.U.A.

would have had to spend years under the government of a Bishop whose every glance made one tremble, whose every word was a reproach if not a snare, whose every procedure seemed planned to tear our Congregation apart. We looked at one another with the joyful surprise of Jacob learning that his beloved Joseph was still alive and thought, perhaps, it was only a dream."²⁵

The consecration ceremonies were to take place one week later on the feast of Saint Raphael the Archangel, October 24. The consecrating prelate was Most Reverend Michael Portier, Bishop of Mobile, assisted by Most Reverend John B. Purcell of Cincinnati and Bishop de la Hailandière. "Monseigneur Bazin has invited Father Corbe," wrote Mother Theodore to Bishop Bouvier, "and two or three of our Sisters may also accompany me in our covered cart, as this good Bishop seems to wish it."²⁶ Bishop Purcell preached, and despite the downpour of rain a large number of priests were in attendance, among them the aged Kentucky missionary, the *Proto-sacerdos* of the United States, Reverend Stephen Theodore Badin, whom Mother Theodore and her companions had met in October, 1840, on their way to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Bishop Portier did the honors at the dinner to which the principal citizens of Vincennes were invited. At the dessert Monseigneur de la Hailandière retired to his room after a day during which he seemed a witness of his own funeral. "It made one sad to see Monseigneur de la Hailandière at this ceremony," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier who was present. "He resembled a man assisting at his own obsequies and discontented with his lot in the other world."²⁷

In the afternoon the kind and touching words of the new Bishop's address to his clergy and to the people of Vincennes drew tears from his hearers. The Reverend Auguste Bessonies, then pastor of Leopold, having refused the still vacant post of superior of the seminary, Bishop Bazin prevailed upon the Reverend Maurice de Saint-Palais, pastor for a year at Madison, to accept it and to share the responsibilities of the diocese as vicar general. Originally there may have been some thought in the new Bishop's mind of allowing his predecessor to remain, but each day showed how fatal such a measure would be to the peace of Indiana, and sadly and regretfully Monseigneur de la Hailandière began his preparations to depart.

During this period of uncertainty and waiting for matters to take on their final development in the diocese, letters from France reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods bringing to Mother Theodore the words of approbation and consolation of which she stood in such great need. The long purgation of the Community was not yet however at an end. Every day brought this fact more vividly to mind. The kind and sympathetic tenor of Bishop Bouvier's letter of September 9, 1847, written from Ruillé was therefore balm to the heart of the Foundress:

It is a long time, my dear Sister, since I have written to you directly, but you will easily understand that I had reason to suspect that a letter from me might fall into other hands than yours. I have however never ceased to feel for you

²⁵ Annals, p. 65.

²⁶ 21 octobre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

²⁷ Annals, p. 66.

and your excellent Sisters the deepest interest. . . . We cannot but approve your conduct, your Mothers and I, in the harsh circumstances in which you have been placed. We are very well satisfied also with the union of mind and heart manifested by your dear Sisters. This has been for us a true consolation.

Have you reached the end of your contradictions? God alone knows. Let your hearts be filled then with confidence but also with courage, and say with the Prophet, "My heart is ready, O Lord; my heart is ready for all that You wish". . . . When writing to you we do not have the interesting events to report that you have in your letters. Your communications are never too long for our desires.²⁸

Mother Theodore, owing to a severe cold and to a continued down-pour of rain which would have made the exposure of the journey to Vincennes extremely imprudent, was unable to accept Bishop Bazin's invitation to be present at his consecration. The Vincennes Sisters had made great preparations for her coming, and their disappointment was extreme. Sister Marie Joseph's arrival, convalescent from her serious illness, but still able to assume her duties as superior at Vincennes, soon permitted Sister Saint Francis Xavier to return to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, where she found her beloved Mother in an almost dying state from another attack of pneumonia. Faithful Dr. Baty was at her bedside, and Sister Olympiade hardly left her. The sharpest crisis of the Foundress's malady seemed to abate however, as the Sisters passed the door of her sick room carrying in procession the relics of Saint Urban. Never had Sister Olympiade seen her in greater danger, and at one time even her sturdy faith was shaken. Prayer and confidence returned, however, and again won back the precious life of the Foundress.

To one person, these days, his last in Indiana, were painful in the extreme. Bishop de la Hailandière, despite his every effort and wish was now obliged to consent to retire. His offer to work under his successor finally and firmly refused, he had no choice but to go. He was said to be contemplating buying a house and settling down in Vincennes. Till the end of November, however, nothing was to be learned of his intentions. His treatment of Mother Theodore had finally become generally known, and was as generally condemned. Exaggerations which have persisted in some cases to the present day added excommunication and imprisonment to the very real penalties he had inflicted upon her. She herself had been prepared for the worst, especially during the weeks before Bishop Bazin's arrival when the Community was so uncertain of his attitude and his sentiments. "My good Mother," wrote Mother Theodore to Mother Mary in September, 1847, "if it is decided that I must leave, most assuredly I will go. If I am condemned to pass the rest of my life in an obscure prison I will go there, I assure you, without hesitation. . . . Whatever God wills will happen."²⁹ Even after Bishop Bazin's arrival Bishop de la Hailandière's urgent and repeated suggestions and the mass of manuscript material he had left behind him had an evident effect upon the new Bishop in ways very painful to the Community.

After his consecration, however, Bishop Bazin at once turned his attention to every phase of his duties in Vincennes. Long years of heroic labor on the Alabama missions had equipped him for his task, abetted by

²⁸ S.M.W.A.

²⁹ 26 septembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

a thorough understanding of the American character and a fluent command of English acquired before leaving France. These assets however, valuable as they were, were not the best items of the new Bishop's equipment for his future career in Indiana. His learning, adequate though not profound, his all-embracing zeal, and his saintly character were still more precious qualities. He was a Lyonese, born in 1796, and therefore fifty-one years of age. Although he was only two years older than Bishop de la Hailandière, his already white hair gave him a venerable appearance which was belied by his vigor and energy. His appearance and his first sermon recalled to the people of Vincennes the self-sacrificing charity of their beloved Bishop Bruté. The burning zeal and complete devotedness he brought to his brief episcopate showed no diminution in its exercise from the ardor which had in the diocese of Mobile for sixteen years (1831-1847) characterized him as superior and professor at Spring Hill College, as general procurator and manager, as missionary and vicar general. His knowledge and his experience in the field of education rendered him eminently fitted to cope with the difficulties of Vincennes, and the diocese soon felt the effects of his enlightened zeal. "The people of Vincennes," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, "found again in Bishop Bazin the simplicity and charity of their beloved Monseigneur Bruté. He does not possess his vast genius, but he has his heart."³⁰

Finally on December 6 Bishop de la Hailandière left Vincennes never to see it again. His trunks had gone by steamboat a week earlier.

At last, my beloved Mother, wrote Sister Marie Joseph, at last he is gone. Yesterday morning he took the stage to Evansville. He will not go to New Orleans, as they say the yellow fever is still raging there. Dr. Baty told us that he has been invited by the Bishop of Philadelphia, who, he says, is the only friend he has found in America, to spend the winter there. . . . His intention was to return and even to buy a house here. . . . It is said that he expects to stop at Madison for at least a few days.³¹

On the same day Bishop Bazin described the departure to Father Corbe:

Monseigneur de la Hailandière at last decided to go. He left us yesterday. No one knows his destination. This good Bishop is truly to be pitied. Like Don Quixote he tilts against windmills. He even imagined that I was influenced against him by bad advisers, that I listened to his enemies, etc. He accused me of treating him like a Bishop driven from his see and so forth. The letter he left for me at his departure has affected me deeply, made me ill in fact, but in two or three days I hope all this will be over. I pity him more than I blame him, and I exerted myself to show him every consideration imaginable. My only fault was not to have invited him to remain in the diocese and install himself in the new house which he had built for this purpose. You will judge whether that was a fault. However, may God be with him and bless him.³²

Pity was the universal sentiment though the only persons to mourn his departure were the devoted French serving maids of the rectory and the seminary, Jeannette and Jeanne, Angélique and Madeleine. As for the Sisters, all their bitter trials of over seven years were buried in the Heart

³⁰ A Mère Marie, 2 novembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

³¹ A Mother Theodore, 7 décembre,, 1847. S.M.W.A.

³² 7 décembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

of Christ. Mother Theodore, who had suffered more than anyone else, could write to Mother Mary: "We pray for him daily, and I beg you, my dear Mother, not to forget him. He will be much higher in heaven. I am convinced, than if he had remained Bishop."³³ Mother Mary's reply confirmed the Community in their determination to draw a veil over their crosses of the past and especially over their author:

We share in the happiness brought to your heart and soul [by the kindness of Bishop Bazin] as we shared in the pains, contradictions, and great trials to which Heaven has subjected you since your departure from France. Now do not think of the past; never speak of it, and do not allow him to be spoken of, who caused them and who was only the instrument of which God made use to aid you in atoning for your sins.³⁴

This was also Bishop Bazin's advice in his first letter to Mother Theodore shortly after his consecration. "I have read your letter with the deepest emotion and tears. Bury the past in forgetfulness and never think of it, save to bless the Providence of God which has sent you crosses out of love, for He never fails to afflict His true children."³⁵

Despite the news of the terrible yellow fever epidemic, the worst within the city's experience, which had been devastating New Orleans during the summer and autumn, the pilgrim chose, however, to spend the winter there. On his way south Monseigneur de la Hailandière passed some time at Madison with Father DuPontavice and then went on to New Orleans. He stopped again at Madison on February 28 for a month on his slow return progress north and eastward to embark for France. Later, after Bishop Bazin's premature death, he told the Madison Sisters that though he was leaving, he would return as Bishop. This startling news was speedily whispered about the diocese, and Father Kundek was said to be designated to circulate a petition to retain him. The Sisters heard all this with an unwonted return of their old sinking of heart. Some of them recalled the return of Napoleon from Elba and saw themselves already on the road to exile from the diocese. Archbishop Eccleston however did not encourage any of these efforts: "My respect for your views and feelings," he wrote, "would not permit me ever to suggest your return to the See of Vincennes after having read the objections on which you ground your repugnance to such a measure. Still your stay for a little longer time among us may, from your local knowledge and experience, facilitate the selection of suitable names to be sent to the Holy See."³⁶

Proceeding gradually toward the East, the Bishop stopped at Louisville and Philadelphia and spent some days in New York with Bishop Hughes leaving in his care the extensive collection of Bruté material which he had taken from the Vincennes Cathedral archives. This large collection, upon which Bishop Hughes had expected to draw in writing a life of Bruté, was afterward used by the Most Reverend James Roosevelt Bayley, Bishop of Newark, and later Archbishop of Baltimore, in his life of Bishop Bruté in 1865, and also by the Church historian Henri de Courcy, although refused to John Gilmary Shea. The immense amount of manuscript mate-

³³ 3 janvier, 1848. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ 29 janvier, 1848. S.M.W.A.

³⁵ 28 octobre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

³⁶ May 3, 1848. N.D.U.A.

rial Bishop de la Hailandière had gathered and which he left in the Cathedral archives of Vincennes consisting largely of his own correspondence bore the same characteristic which marked all his documents, an evident design to exonerate his own errors and to blame others. The upright and charitable judgment of Bishop de Saint-Palais in the first months of his episcopate was that the entire collection was worse than useless, and with the help of the seminarians he committed it all in several barrels to the flames. The only manuscript of Bishop de la Hailandière's still preserved at Vincennes is the minutes of the trustees' meetings before 1841.

At last on May 20 the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods learned that he had gone, very sadly and regretfully, after naming as his choice for the vacant See of Vincennes the Reverend Maurice de Saint-Palais, his fellow-traveler in Bishop Bruté's missionary contingent of 1836. He set sail for France as his nephew said, "A Bishop without a See." His later life is soon told. Though vigorous and zealous, and still in the prime of life, he never received any position in the French Church but remained living quietly in retirement attended by his niece, Prudence, on a small family property which he owned at Triandin near Combours, his birthplace, situated in the department of Ille-et-Vilaine between Rennes and Saint-Servan in the old province of Brittany. Toward the end of his sojourn at Vincennes the opinion had arisen and has lasted in some quarters to the present day that his mind had become unhinged, and in later years when some few visitors from America sought him out, they observed with astonishment that he seemed a normal person whereas they had heard that he was deranged. He was visited in his exile by his nephew, Father Audran, on several occasions, by Father Kundek, Bishop de Saint-Palais, and Bishop Martin, also by Dr. Baty and his family during a short residence in France. Bishop Martin wrote to Mother Theodore in 1855: "I have seen your former Bishop in his little house at Triandin where his life is that of a solitary and where no one comes to trouble his recollection. He wishes to sell out and return to the United States."³⁷

He continued devoted to his old diocese and signed himself to the end "Ancien Evêque de Vincennes." In later years he corresponded with Sister Mary Joseph Le Fer de la Motte and delighted to send money to the orphans. The year before he died he sent a substantial donation to Bishop Chatard for the needs of the diocese. Earlier he had sent very welcome church linens to Saint Mary's, among them the rochet he had worn at his consecration in Paris in 1839. When *An Apostolic Woman*³⁸ appeared in France in 1879, with true Breton tenacity he reasserted his old claim to complete domination as Bishop of the Community, spiritual and temporal, in one of the imperious letters which it had been his custom to write to all from Sisters to Cardinal, who ventured to differ from him.

During all these years, his nephew assures us, he rose daily at four A.M. from a bed of straw and observed to the letter the régime he had learned in his youth in the Sulpician seminary in Paris. He gave a weekly

³⁷ 1 janvier, 1855. S.M.W.A.

³⁸ The life and letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier published by her sister, Clementine de la Corbinière.

dinner to the priests of the neighborhood and was to be seen at every important church celebration. At Le Mans in 1857 he was present at the consecration of the Church of the Holy Cross, and in 1860 assisted in the consecration of Most Reverend Pierre Dufal, first Bishop of Eastern Bengal. His services were always freely given to his brother Bishops especially for ordinations, and towards the end of his life he could count the priests he had ordained to the number of eight hundred. Of these the first was the Reverend Hippolyte DuPontavice, "his eldest son," whom he had raised to the priesthood on November 30, 1839, just after his return as Bishop to Vincennes. Their correspondence was carried on regularly till Father DuPontavice's death in 1874, and his letters of all these years, one of the treasures of the Notre Dame Archives, recount faithfully and accurately the progress of diocese and nation during over a generation. More than once he assured the Bishop of the kindly sentiments of Fathers Alphonse Munschina and John Guéguen. Further he could not go among the clergy of the Vincennes diocese.

His nephew, Father Audran, did much to perpetuate his memory. The octogenarian Bishop had always cherished the wish to sleep his last long sleep in the crypt chapel of the Cathedral among the former Bishops of Vincennes, and had sought this privilege from the Most Reverend Francis Silas Chatard after his appointment to the See of Vincennes in 1878. The old prelate died May 1, 1882, eighty-four years old minus a day, as he had been born May 2, 1798. Eight days later his obsequies were performed with great solemnity, Monseigneur Place, Archbishop of Rennes, presiding at the ceremonies, and the remains were buried temporarily in the parish church of Combourg. A commemorative service was held in Saint John's Church in Indianapolis on June 7, 1882, at which the Reverend Ernest Audran preached the lengthy discourse later incorporated in Alerding's *History of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Vincennes*, which was published the following year. One day in late autumn of 1882 in Vincennes a little boy³⁰ was returning home with his mother from morning Mass when they saw the local hearse coming slowly down the street towards the Cathedral, its doors flapping disconsolately upon a great travel-stained wooden box which protruded from the rear. Thus it was at long last that the Most Reverend Célestin René Laurent Guynemer de la Hailandière, *Ancien Evêque de Vincennes* returned to the scene of his early labors. Father Audran had hastened to France to bring his remains back to Vincennes as he had requested. He was buried the next day, November 22, 1882, the casket still undisturbed in the great wooden box, next to Bishop Bazin at the right of the crypt chapel which he had built for the remains of Bishop Bruté forty-two years before.

The Reverend Herman Alerding, later Bishop of Fort Wayne, when he wrote his *History* had a unique opportunity to obtain the facts on the career of Bishop de la Hailandière. Ordained in 1860 he knew personally many priests still living who had made up the 1839 contingent of French priests and others also of Bishop Bruté's 1836 colony. Fathers Chassé, John Guéguen, Benoit, Bessonies, Weinzoepflen, Munschina, Dion, and others were still living, but in deference to Father Audran's feelings, Father

³⁰ Mr. Harry V. Somes, Sister Rose Xavier's father.

Alerding confined himself to printing the discourse delivered by the Bishop's Reverend nephew in Indianapolis a year earlier.

Bishop de la Hailandière's strangely checkered career brings home again the age-old lesson that nowhere does the Church suffer more poignantly than in her Bishops and bears out with renewed insistence the care she gives to selecting them. Naturally the worst traits of Bishop de la Hailandière's character appear in his dealings with the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, a poor trembling group of foreign women. He is said to have stated that it was they who forced him to resign his See. He was accustomed to implicate others, Bishop Bouvier, Father Bellier, Father Corbe, *tout le monde*, in fact, but history points to the indubitable fact that he resigned his position because he could maintain it no longer. He could terrify the Sisters and retain them in the diocese by threats of privation of the Sacraments and excommunication, but in the meantime his priests were slipping through his fingers. Nothing was easier than to be "proud, terrible, crushing before the little woman at Terre Haute,"⁴⁰ but, to quote his own words, "If things continue thus, there will soon be not a single priest left in the parishes." In the annals of God, it may well be recorded that the seven years of sorrow, the years of Bishop de la Hailandière's relations with the Community, were the means of its greatest blessings, the refining and perfecting of Mother Theodore's sanctity, the foundation and consolidation of the Sisters of Providence in America, their perfect union and charity cemented by suffering, and their integration into the development of the Church in Indiana. Mother Mary found in the crosses the Community had endured the most precious testimonies of the blessing of God:

Do you wish to know, Sister Theodore, of what utility these measures have been to your little Congregation? They have served more than peace and prosperity to establish it on a solid foundation by showing its members the necessity and efficacy of trials borne with courage in a spirit of faith. Prayer, union, and love of the cross will then be, as it were, the three principal foundation stones of this edifice erected to the greater glory of God.⁴¹

Despite the ever-present threat to their permanent establishment in the diocese and even to their existence as a religious body, Bishop de la Hailandière's influence upon the Community was surprisingly slight in view of lasting effects. For only one major decision was he alone responsible, the location in the forest of Vigo County. No other measure of permanent importance can be attributed to his advice or assistance. The true story of his treatment of Mother Theodore, though long current in the diocese, was never published till 1904 when *The Life and Lifework of Mother Theodore* written by Sister Mary Theodosia Mug was brought out. Delayed for many years by the long life of the Bishop's nephew, Father Audran, it was published at last on the insistence of Bishop Chatard, who averred that incorrect accounts of the matter were extant in the archives of many of the older dioceses of the United States. Most Reverend William George McCloskey, Bishop of Louisville, who called upon Bishop Chatard to protest, found the Reverend Joseph Chartrand,

⁴⁰ Bellier to Martin, 9 juin, 1847. N.D.U.A.

⁴¹ 29 janvier, 1848. S.M.W.A.

at that time the Bishop's secretary, reading the book for the household at meals to their great edification.

God alone had delivered the Sisters of Providence. Father Corbe always thought and said that he had saved the Community for Indiana. The news that Bishop Bazin had been appointed came at the crucial hour. In another few weeks Mother Theodore would have been driven from Indiana, perhaps never to return. With deep humility and gratitude for the rest of their lives the Sisters chanted daily in their Office the inspired words of the Psalmist, "The snare is broken and we are delivered." A hundred years serve to clarify and evaluate events in unmistakable and striking ways. Gazing upon the singular career of Bishop de la Hailandière, one pauses mute and respectful before the inscrutable ways of God with the souls of men.

In the meantime at Vincennes the new Bishop was winning all hearts by his kindness and zeal. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had been captivated by the gracious charity of his first interview with the Sisters. Sister Marie Joseph, who though still confined to her bed with the illness she had suffered at Jasper, had frequent contacts with Monseigneur Bazin, was similarly impressed. One of Monseigneur Bouvier's fatherly letters recommending the Sisters to the care of their new Bishop intensified these mutual kindly sentiments. The school in Vincennes was growing and accomplishing much good among the children. During the previous year forty children had been prepared by the Sisters for First Communion and Confirmation. Now the Bishop was desirous of reclaiming a number of the older members of the parish who had lapsed from the practice of their religion, and he wished the Sisters to assist him by visiting the families of the French Catholics. Sister Marie Joseph, upon whom this duty would naturally fall, concurred in the Bishop's good intentions, but her frail health remained an insuperable obstacle. Dr. Baty was trying to decide whether her lungs were affected. This proved eventually to have been the case, though she partially recovered and lived five years longer. She was sending Mother Theodore glowing accounts of the new Bishop:

Ah, my good Mother, if you knew how full my heart is of joy and gratitude to the good God for having preserved us thus amid so many difficulties! Today at High Mass I saw this good Bishop whom God sent us in His mercy at the moment when humanly speaking our dear Congregation was destroyed and lost, condemned to wander forth in search of shelter. Is not this worthy of admiration? If we had never borne the beautiful name of daughters of Providence, we ought now to assume it. When I saw the Bishop for the first time today enter the sanctuary in his pontifical robes, I felt my heart fill with love and gratitude toward God. I feel sure that you will like him. How I would love to see the joy that will animate that little flock at Saint Mary's when they see this good Bishop!"⁴⁹

In Sister Marie Joseph's letters of this time appears first the title given affectionately to three Bishops at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, *Père Evêque*, "Father Bishop," borne successively by Bishops Bazin, Saint-Palais, and Chatard.

Of one thing, however, the Community quickly became aware. Bishop Bazin had taken the determination to deprive them of their Mother. This

⁴⁹ Novembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

one effect remained from his communications with Bishop de la Hailandière.

In the very letter of December 7 in which she announced his departure, Sister Marie Joseph delivered a message from Bishop Bazin asking Mother Theodore to come to Vincennes. Father Deydier had written asking for Sisters for Evansville, and this and other important matters the Bishop wished to discuss with her. Mother Theodore had not yet met Bishop Bazin. Father Martin had advised her not to hasten to Vincennes. Her illness in October had also prevented her being present at the consecration ceremonies, and though Dr. Baty left Saint Mary's on All Saints' Day considering his patient out of danger, she had a serious relapse about ten days later and was very ill again with a terrible attack of fever. Only on November 27 was she able to receive Holy Communion for the first time in the chapel, and on the thirtieth both she and Sister Saint Francis Xavier, who had also been ill for two weeks, assisted at Mass of which the Foundress had been deprived since October 22. She was able to make a business trip to Terre Haute however on December 1. The steamboats were now coming to the pier there, and the exposure on the river was not so great nor the trip so long and fatiguing as that on the stage. The season was advanced however. Winter had set in, and as she was still only convalescent, the Sisters saw her undertake the journey with great uneasiness.

She left on December 7 and was back at Saint Mary's on the nineteenth before Sunday High Mass. The new Bishop had received her with the utmost kindness and listened with tears to the story of the years of sorrow and humiliation through which the Community had passed. One of the first subjects discussed however was the necessity of electing a new superior general. "Monseigneur de la Hailandière had shown him in our Rule the article which required a triennial election of the superior, but had not mentioned that in order to keep this Rule twenty others must be broken."⁴³ Mother Theodore on her return expressed her wish that the Community would consent. Sister Marie Joseph had shown herself willing, but Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Mary Cecilia said no. Father Corbe, too, though groaning at the prospect of being plunged into another struggle, declared without hesitation that he would oppose an election to the utmost of his power.

Events had in the past months supplied the Community with an additional motive to reject any thought of an election. Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer was the only Sister except Mother Theodore who was eligible according to the required ten years of final vows. Her excessive timidity and a tactlessness amounting to cruelty in her attitude toward Mother Theodore, practically refusing to have her in the house when she was sick and suffering from the Bishop's condemnation in the yellow house at Vincennes, had been under the eyes of Sister Mary Cecilia and Sister Olympiade while they were caring for the Foundress. She was also said to have remarked that if Bishop de la Hailandière returned to Europe she would go too, although at the following retreat in August she had been removed from Vincennes at his express demand. Under the circumstances

⁴³ Annals, p. 68.

not one Sister would accept her as superior general. Nothing could be done however till the return of the Sisters on mission to the motherhouse in the coming August. The matter of the election was allowed therefore to fall into abeyance for the present, and long before then the good Bishop of Vincennes was to be resting in his tomb.

Peace and quiet, security and good will had already descended upon the tortured diocese of Vincennes during the few short weeks of Bishop Bazin's incumbency. His important decision not under any circumstances to retain the services of his predecessor had an almost immediate effect. Cowed and broken spirits took heart again in an era of kindly justice like the reign of the angel in Sicily in Longfellow's ballad. Many plans and desires occupied the saintly Bishop during these months. Over and above his wish to reclaim the careless Catholics of the town, a labor to which he devoted himself with zeal and success, no phase of the diocese escaped his wise and intelligent care. On December 18 he ordained William Doyle, Sister Philomene's and Sister Lucy's brother, Father Martin's former protégé from Logansport, who had spent so many vacations as a seminarian at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. He had been awaiting ordination for some time, and the Bishop acceded to his desires now in the only ordination ceremony of his brief episcopate. Ordained at the same time was the Reverend Bartholomew Piers, son of Thomas Piers who had built the first church in the New Albany region on his farm at Floyd Knobs in 1825. Father Piers was for nearly fifty years pastor of Saint Peter's Church at Montgomery, Indiana. The story is told of him that an elder brother who had preceded him in the seminary had died while he himself was still at home. The news was brought while he and his father were engaged in plowing a field. Like the sons of Zebedee, leaving his father and his plow in the field, he departed at once saying, "I am going to take his place."

Changes among the clergy were numerous, but one of the Bishop's chief anxieties was the moribund Saint Gabriel's College. Father Bellier had long hoped to induce the Eudist superior in France, Father Louis de Rennes, to assume the college's indebtedness. He had, in fact, made use of every possible means to persuade him to save the institution. Father Martin was commissioned to use his influence in Europe, but he failed, and Father Chassé also. The Order had taken charge in the meantime of Spring Hill College in Mobile in 1846. If this venture had succeeded, the Eudists would probably have left Vincennes earlier. But at Mobile also their financial difficulties early discouraged Bishop Portier. The Bishop, who was the founder of the college, had not been the prime mover in the coming of the Eudists to Mobile, as they were already in search of a location which would permit them to leave Indiana advantageously. Father Bellier offered an attractive course at Spring Hill College and had gathered a numerous and competent faculty. Most of them however were unfamiliar with the English language and with the American character and customs. Father Bellier's own talents and distinguished personality lent interest and awakened hopes which proved however short-lived. When he reduced the yearly terms from two hundred and sixty dollars, which the southern planters were able and willing to pay, to one hundred which was all that could be obtained in Indiana, and was in consequence unable to

pay his running expenses, Bishop Portier had no further hope for success."

Whether or not Father Bellier was convinced that Bishop de la Hailandière was to remain in Indiana and that consequently there was no more hope there for the Eudists, he left Vincennes for good at the end of September. The old college which had been sold for debt to Father Vabret in 1839, was to go again on January 8 under the hammer of the auctioneer. Finally on December 29, 1847, Bishop Bazin purchased the large, roomy, and historic old building with its widespreading grounds, and installed in it the reconstituted Saint Gabriel's College combined with the diocesan seminary which had hitherto been an independent organization. The funds for this purpose had to be raised, for although Bishop de la Hailandière spent large sums upon his real estate and building projects, he never had ready money, as is amply proved by his letters to Mother Theodore. He received the funds for his voyage on leaving Vincennes from Bishop Bazin. Monseigneur de la Hailandière's personal income had diminished considerably during his years in America, but in September, 1847, he had purchased for four thousand dollars a desirable site in Indianapolis and this with an equivalent sum of money he had handed over as a basis for the yearly pension of four hundred dollars which he was asking from the diocese.

The need for cash to save Saint Gabriel's probably explains the two mortgages of the corner at Fifth and Market and the former site of the Nazareth Sisters' school, now a part of the George Rogers Clark Memorial Plaza, executed by Bishop Bazin to Joseph Picquet of Saint Marie, Illinois, just at the opening of the new year.⁴⁵ The Catholic Directory for 1848 lists the Vincennes "Theological Seminary" with twenty students, seventeen theologians and three philosophers, and Saint Gabriel's College, still directed by the Eudists with Reverend John B. Chassé of that society as president,⁴⁶ but after the purchase of the old college building the two groups were united under the presidency of Father de Saint-Palais with the college enrollment limited to Catholic boys, Father Chassé remaining only till the new régime had begun to function smoothly.

The decision to remove the seminarians to the college led to a second change much more momentous in actuality to the Sisters of Vincennes. They were to leave the Bishop's "big ugly house so far from the church," as Sister Saint Francis called it, the scene of so many hardships and sorrows, to which they had been removed on the departure of the Sisters of Charity four years earlier, and were to return to the "desirable corner lot" at Second and Church Streets upon which Bishop de la Hailandière had made such extensive improvements in the spring of 1847. Bishop Bazin announced the news to Mother Theodore in the same letter in which he informed her that he had purchased the College and before he had told the Sisters in Vincennes of their good fortune. The new location was eminently desirable, spacious, conveniently located near the Cathedral, and much better adapted than the yellow house to the purposes of a school. It had moreover a handsome little chapel completed only eight months earlier,

⁴⁴ Michael Kenny, S.J., *The Torch on the Hill* (America Press, New York, 1931), pp. 108-110.

⁴⁵ Knox County Court House Records.

⁴⁶ Father Bertin, later superior general of the Eudists, was also on the faculty.

where they could have Mass occasionally, an immense boon to Sister Marie Joseph, who had not been able to go to the Cathedral for morning Mass since her arrival in Vincennes over two months previous. To their great consolation it happened that one of the first Masses celebrated in their new convent was the anniversary Requiem for their departed Sister Saint Liguori offered by Father de Saint-Palais on January 27, 1848. Mother Theodore refers to the Sisters' new location in a letter to Mother Mary written at New Year's, 1848:

Immediately before Monseigneur Bazin's arrival Bishop de la Hailandière had built a seminary, arranged with great symmetry, a real *bijou*. This house, which is really charming and quite near the Cathedral, was very dear to him, though more suitable from its interior arrangement for a religious house than a seminary. A letter just received from Vincennes from Bishop Bazin, informs me that he is presenting this house to our Sisters in Vincennes to be used for a school and an orphanage. He is converting the college into his seminary, an arrangement quite contrary to the plans of the late Bishop, who will be extremely disappointed. Monseigneur Bazin shows on every occasion the most paternal affection for us, and I have heard from Vincennes that he has renounced his project of replacing me. If it is true, so much the worse for me. We are hoping that this good Father will come to see us at the end of the present month, if the weather permits.⁴⁷

The Bishop was desirous of seeing the Sisters established in their new quarters as speedily as possible. The winter of 1848 was a severe one, but the week after New Year's was fair and calm, and the Bishop hoped to have the moving completed before the anticipated break in the weather. Now that the seminarians had left Church Street, there was no further reason for delay. He himself worked from morning till night helping to pack and unload furniture, planning and directing. The superior, still ill and helpless, could only observe from her bed or her chair, but Sister Anastasie and Sister Rose, whom Mother Theodore had brought to replace Sister Mary Xavier in December, were young and strong and rushed to and fro working with a will. The Bishop oversaw everything, and his practical directions, as they later acknowledged, saved them many a step. Perhaps the simple, kindly character of their saintly prelate never appeared to greater advantage than in those days crowded with hurried labor. Sister Marie Joseph tells us that the last piece of furniture to be moved was that "poor old machine," the superior, as she calls herself. "I came in the Bishop's carriage," she wrote to Mother Theodore, "and the trip was so short that I came off better than the rest of the furniture which was more or less scratched or broken en route,"⁴⁸ and just in time, for they had hardly reached their new home when the snow began to fall in thick heavy flakes which lay upon the ground for weeks. "Winter has at last come on," wrote Philip Doyle to Father Martin. "... We have had a snow of about a foot and a half. The church is cold enough to freeze a saint if there were any to be frozen."⁴⁹

The moving over, a few days of indoor labor, and they were settled for the winter. Here too the Bishop stayed all the first day and worked with them like an intelligent and thoughtful father. He decided that Sister

⁴⁷ 3 janvier, 1848. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁸ 11 janvier, 1848. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ December 19, 1847. S.M.W.A.

Marie Joseph should have the room formerly occupied by the president of the seminary, as it was next to the *salon* where through the open door the warmth from the stove would keep her comfortable, and he set up the bed himself. The most desirable classroom he chose for Sister Gabriella, who was the eldest of the teachers, and helped to arrange it. Sister Marie Joseph's cough was better, but she remained very weak, and her appetite was variable. She wrote to Mother Theodore for a warm shawl, for the house had no interior communications, and to go to the chapel, refectory, kitchen, or classrooms she had to use the court. A minor detail no doubt this was to the healthy young seminarians, but the bitter cold chilled the poor sick superior to the bones. The chapel too was cold, but she could hear Mass from Sister Gabriella's warm classroom next door.

The new location was much more retired than Fifth and Market had been. The house was very satisfactory however, and when spring was in the air the bright sunny court with its budding shrubs and trees was most enjoyable. Nothing could surpass the Bishop's kindly interest in their comfort and their welfare, nor his evident satisfaction in seeing them in such pleasant quarters. The two light-hearted novices took everything for granted, but Sister Marie Joseph and Sister Gabriella, who alone knew all of the Community's bitter past, thanked God many times in their hearts that now at last the sunshine of His peace and security were to be theirs after so many trials. Their school in its pleasant new location continued to increase. Sister Gabriella had sixty pupils enrolled, with forty-nine in regular attendance. Sister Marie Joseph's letters give some glimpses of the character of her Sisters: "Sister Anastasie," she wrote to Mother Theodore, "is a sterling character but more interested in painting and the fine arts than in domestic labor." The Hoosier maidens might be perforce adept in the pioneer arts of soap making and salting pork, but they relinquished them willingly for brush and palette.

The Bishop's plans for Vincennes were now functioning satisfactorily. The seminary and college under Father de Saint-Palais was gradually resuming the old régime which the students had loved under Father Martin. "On feast days," wrote Philip Doyle to his old professor at Baton Rouge, "Mr. Saint-Palais reminds us of you, especially in his rochet and mozetta, for he and Mr. DuPontavice are now Vicars and Cannons [sic] of the Cathedral."⁵⁰ Many of the old sinners who had been years away from the sacraments had returned to the practice of their religious duties. The Bishop could now think of his long projected visit to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. In spite of the fervent prayers of the children at Vincennes, the cold rain continued all during his journey. The Sisters would have preferred to have the Bishop see their forest home in its spring or autumn glory:

The winter is so rigorous this year that one can hardly leave the house, wrote Mother Theodore giving some sidelights on the adventurous and resourceful American character which she never ceased to observe with interest. More snow has fallen during the past month than has been seen in thirty years, and it falls in so great abundance that the air is darkened. In a few hours it is two or three feet deep; then comes a severe frost which freezes it through, and the Americans travel on it in sleighs, a sort of carriage of astonishing swiftness which they like very much. They drive out on the ice every day with their wives and children, whom it

⁵⁰ To Reverend Augustine Martin, December 19, 1847. S.M.W.A.

is a pleasure to see. Suddenly the weather changes, and an extreme heat in one morning melts all the ice and renders the roads impassable, only to begin all over again to snow and freeze. Before coming here I had no idea of such a climate, and every year it seems new for me.⁵¹

On January 8, the very day when the Sisters who were moving from the yellow house in Vincennes were overtaken by a snowstorm, the snow fell so thick and so quickly at Saint Mary's that in two hours after noon six inches covered the ground. The cold was extreme, and many Sisters and children were ill. On the twelfth Sister Saint Francis Xavier began to write in the diary, as Mother Theodore was attacked again by her old malady, "inflammation of the lungs." She was still confined to her bed, weak and suffering, when Monseigneur Bazin arrived for his promised visit on January 25. Sister Saint Francis describes his visit in the Annals:

He was like a father among us. He gave us several instructions, heard our confessions, visited the classes, showed the greatest concern for our Mother's health . . . and altered with her a few points of the Rule which could not be easily followed in America. He restored the observance of the point which required breakfast at seven, thinking that Our Lord would prefer its accomplishment to a longer thanksgiving. He was afflicted to note the location of our buildings and their distance from one another and from the church.

Back at Vincennes, he wrote to all the Sisters on mission, to Mobile, to the Propagation of the Faith, and to Rome of the joy which his visit to Saint Mary's had given him. He promised to return in August to preach our retreat and to see united all the dear daughters upon whom he reposed his dearest hopes. God in His impenetrable decrees had ordained however that the good Bishop would enjoy this consolation only from heaven.⁵²

Work on the new wings begun in the previous summer was still going on. The outdoor labor continued late into the autumn. The plastering and painting went on during September, and on October 1 the painters were giving the final coat of pale yellow to the front with "an impermeable preparation," as Mother Theodore notes in the diary. Variety in house-painting was still unusual, and most American buildings showed the white with green shutters which Mother Theodore had admired in Brooklyn in 1840. Mr. Roquet was in charge of the interior fittings, which continued during the winter, and of a series of improvements out of doors which were carried on simultaneously with the labor of gathering and drying the apples, cutting the clover, and shucking the corn till the cold weather set in. Only on November 9 did Mother Theodore note, "The postulants resume their studies," a fact which marked the term of the summer labors. James Sheerin had signed a contract in August to construct for a hundred and sixty dollars a dam over the ravine on the side "which separates us from the road." The workmen completed the project but a week later a torrential rain carried it away. The construction of a permanent dam at that time was abandoned, and Messrs. Marcile and Eluere came from Vincennes for a week in November to replace it by a new bridge.

Further improvements undertaken at this time included a plan to lengthen the avenue by removing farther away the road which ran through the Community grounds. During the winter a frame house was con-

⁵¹ A Mère Marie, 3 janvier, 1848. S.M.W.A.

⁵² P. 69.

structed for the workmen. Gradually better built frame and brick houses replaced the original log constructions on the farm. A stable for the cows and another for the horses were erected during the winter. The number of animals was increasing. Father Lalumiere had given "his little black horse" to Father Corbe, and now and then a new colt appeared in the farmyard. Prices for food were high, but the Community owned a considerable number of pigs, always a staple article of food on the frontier. Pork was abundant all over Indiana during this winter. Mother Theodore described the situation to Bishop Bouvier:

Our farmers are in distress now. Some have as many as two thousand pigs, which they can sell at only a cent and a half a pound or even less. We seem to be among the prodigal sons, for our Indiana is covered with pigs. We salted twenty-five last week, and we have fifty for next year.

When it is possible to voyage in the machines which are being built for ocean travel, I will provide for you, and you will see how good our Saint Mary's bacon is, and especially the *ham*. It is our turn this year to pay a high price for bread. We pay two and a half cents a pound for flour, and we must have a great deal to feed our seventy-two persons here in the woods. Our school is our only source of income, and half the pupils do not pay us.

Illness had been general:

We have several sick Sisters, among them Sister Mary Xavier, who is suffering from inflammation of the lungs. Sister Marie Joseph, superior at Vincennes, is very ill, and Sister Saint Francis weaker than usual. As for myself, I have never been such a helpless creature but, too, I have never before been almost fifty years old.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ 3 janvier, 1848. S.M.W.A.

CHAPTER XXII

ILLNESS AND DEATH OF BISHOP BAZIN

"In losing Bishop Bazin, we have lost
a father, a protector, a saint!"

MOTHER THEODORE

ONE of Bishop Bazin's charitable projects had been a pharmacy for the sick poor of Vincennes as he had observed that many of them suffered from neglect, especially during the winter when the cold is often sharp along the Wabash. As the French Rule of the Sisters of Providence required a similar *œuvre* or good work to be attached to every school, Mother Theodore was glad to accede to the Bishop's wishes. Sister Olympiade's gay and cheerful character and her skill as a sick nurse had recommended her to the Bishop for this enterprise, but she could never be spared from Saint Mary's in Mother Theodore's precarious state of health. Her devoted, experienced, and careful nursing had probably been the decisive human factor in the Foundress's recovery more than once, and nothing but a positive command of obedience could have induced Sister Olympiade to leave her patient. Sister Joachim had had some experience in caring for the sick. She had also already proved herself the quintessence of prudence and charity, and as Dr. Baty would always be at hand to be consulted in case of need, Mother Theodore therefore chose her for this good work, and she was thus early to begin her long career of self-sacrificing service to the sick, the poor, and the orphans of Vincennes.

Preparations for establishing the pharmacy were now complete. In February the Bishop wrote that the trip to Vincennes could be made easily as steamboats for points up the river were at the pier every day and everything was in readiness as the drugs for the pharmacy had already arrived from Baltimore. Sister Olympiade drew upon her stores of medicinal herbs, the virtues of which she had quickly learned from her pioneer neighbors, the mullein and pokeroor, the calomel, mint, and hoarhound, which could be found in the woods at any time, and the senna, pennyroyal, elder blossoms, and sassafras root, which must be gathered in season. Carefully tied in bunches they hung from the beams of the little log pharmacy at Saint Mary's to be dispensed to the sick of the countryside and used as needed. Now she set aside a generous store for Vincennes, and on March 22 she left with Mother Theodore and Sister Joachim to prepare the pharmacy and to remain for a few days to install and assist the new infirmarian and pharmacist. There was ample space in the new convent on Second and Church Streets, and it was there the pharmacy was to be located. Sister Marie Joseph, the local superior of Vincennes, who had suffered another severe attack this time of the prevalent malaria, also needed care though she was now much better, and as Doctor Baty told the Bishop, would live to fight another campaign.

The spring of this year 1848 had been a time of uneasiness to the French Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and a tragic epoch in the his-

tory of France. Though sincerely devoted to the country of their adoption, they never lost their love for their native land. Gradually in their woods rumors began to drift to them that things were going badly in France with the generous and noble-hearted Orleans sovereigns. Ever since the day in October, 1843, when Mother Theodore and Sister Mary Cecilia had seen the quick tears glisten in Queen Marie-Amélie's eyes upon hearing of their needs, and had experienced her generous charity, she and her family were never forgotten in the Sisters' prayers.

Adverse circumstances had however for some time been closing in on the French sovereigns. Madame Adelaide, so intelligent and so devoted to her brother, had died of influenza in January, 1848, a very great loss to the king, and five years earlier the Duke of Orléans, their eldest son, the most gifted and popular of their children, had been thrown from his carriage and killed. Louis-Philippe was now an old man of seventy-five, and his main support, the middle class or *bourgeoisie* of the country did not represent the views and preferences of the French nation as a whole. The revolt of February, 1848, was in reality however directed only toward the unpopular minister, Guizot, and the issue could have been avoided, though probably only for a time. Louis-Philippe had bestowed upon his harassed country an immense benefit, eighteen years of uninterrupted peace, but now things were getting beyond him. His clever sister, his best counselor, who had been so influential in his mounting the throne in the first place, was no longer at his side, and the abdication was soon signed. The day when the Stuart princes wandered as impecunious pensioners from one indifferent or unwilling court of Europe to another is long past, however, and modern sovereigns have learned increasingly to place little confidence in the solidity of their thrones. Perhaps that was why Louis-Philippe gave up so quickly. His abdication however was the signal for a general outbreak all over Europe. His wealth was rumored to amount to millions in New York and Pennsylvania bonds, and he and his family were reported to be coming to America to live.

To the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods the news came only gradually. Late in March Mr. Murphy, a merchant from Livingston, Illinois, a small place some ten miles from Saint Mary's, spent several hours at the convent. "He informs us," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier in the diary, "that there has been a revolution in France." Mother Theodore was in Vincennes attending to the establishment and equipment of the pharmacy, and she learned there that Louis-Philippe had abdicated in favor of his son, the Duc de Paris, [*sic*]¹ but that a republic had been established. The Bishop had wished after her return to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, to send her the newspapers he had received from France, but they were in great demand and were being passed from hand to hand among the French priests and people in Vincennes. He had retrieved one journal however, which he was sending.

The French Sisters had all lived through the Revolution of 1830, and their parents had gone through the tragic period still called in France "la Terreur." Thus the very word *revolution* struck fear to their hearts. There was not however apparently great cause for alarm:

¹ In reality it was in favor of his grandson, the Comte de Paris, son of the late beloved Duc d'Orléans.

I received a letter from my sisters yesterday evening, wrote the Bishop, and one also from the *curé* of my native place. The letter tells me a few words of the revolution. The glorious republic has been proclaimed without opposition all over France. Not a drop of blood was shed outside of Paris. The clergy are more popular and more highly respected than before. Not a word has been said against them. May God grant that this continues! Let us hope for much, for in France there are many holy souls.²

This letter, the last he wrote to Saint Mary's, and all his relations with the Community at this time, evinced the kindest and most fatherly sentiments towards them. "Be so kind," his letter concludes, "as to recall me to the remembrance and the prayers of your dear Sisters, and present my respects to Mr. Corbe. And you, my good Mother, accept the assurance of the respect and sincere attachment of

Your very devoted father in Jesus Christ,

The poor Bishop of Vincennes

JEAN-ETIENNE"

"I think," wrote Father Corbe about this time, "that the poor Community of Saint Mary's has arrived at the happiest moment since the beginning of its existence." In March, 1848, Father Lalumiere sent a few lines to Father Martin at Baton Rouge:

You must know that long since, the days of gloom and darkness have been banished from our land; now we enjoy peace. Contentment and joy fill all hearts. We have a new Bishop, a man of much simplicity, not holding a high and lofty head over his priests, but a friend to all, much of Bishop Bruté in him. The Sisters have had their day of trouble, but now they rest in peace in their strong and firm hope for the future. Father Corbe has been their faithful guide. He was very near being exterminated for his fidelity, but Providence would not permit it.³

The Bishop was deeply interested in improving the site at Highland and expected to plant some hundreds of fruit trees there. Mother Theodore had offered to contribute some apple trees as the orchard at Saint Mary's had been bearing well owing to Jean Delahaye's care. There were however still some secret causes for anxiety. On the painful subject of electing a successor to their Mother, which had been a thorn in the hearts of the Community for so many months, there was as yet no change in the Bishop's sentiments. He was at one with his predecessor on this point and showed every indication of a fixed intention to press the matter, regardless of Mother Theodore's explicit appointment as Foundress. The Sisters were distressed at the thought that the Bishop wished to insist upon an election which could not be held in conformity with the Rule. For the present, however, the subject, cause of so many heartburnings and anxieties, was postponed till Easter when the Bishop expected to come to Saint Mary's and take the matter up with the Community. As in all their distresses, their refuge in this renewed anxiety was prayer.

From the momentous year 1846 on, considerable changes had taken place in Vigo County and in the country at large. Among the notable improvements of the time was the construction of the first bridge across the Wabash at Terre Haute. It replaced the old ferries except in flood times

² 6 avril, 1848. S.M.W.A.

³ March 28, 1848. S.M.W.A.

when they were still in demand to cover the distance to the terrace at Macksville or even in some instances to the bluffs above and beyond. In April, 1846, a steamboat ferry, much superior in every way to the pioneer scows, crossed the Wabash for the first time. Early in the same year a group of interested men formed the Terre Haute Drawbridge Company. Up-river steamboat traffic was still considerable, but the volume of water in the Wabash, like that of many inland rivers, has greatly diminished since pioneer times, owing largely to the disappearance of the forest, a major item everywhere in flood control, and a phenomenon which eventually came so suddenly that the pioneers could never account for it. Adventurous captains were sometimes able to bring cargoes up the Wabash in summer as late as 1850, although as a rule the steamboat season opened only after the break-up of ice on the rivers in early spring and closed in summer.

February, March, and April were in reality the best months on the river with adequate volume of water, and steamboating lasted at most five months. Unusual rainfall however sometimes lengthened the season or permitted a few boats to navigate at other times. On November 20, 1847, the *Pink* from Lafayette and beyond was at the Terre Haute pier at the foot of Walnut Street, but the up-river traffic was always uncertain, though in 1848, an unusual year, the *Pink* and the *Swan* were running between Terre Haute and Lafayette as late as mid-June, after the river was too low for steamboats to come up from the Ohio. On March 31, 1846, Mother Theodore noted in the diary that the river at Terre Haute was covered with steamboats, eleven for Lafayette and three for other points.

Finally on Christmas Day the same year the new bridge was open for traffic "entirely finished," the toll twenty cents. All the early bridges were toll bridges, but like the ferry passage, the bridge toll was later paid yearly by the Community. Mother Theodore had purchased stock in the bridge to the extent of one hundred dollars, and small sums of interest were received for a few years. Despite the fine building project in the stone bridges and culverts of the National Road, said for many years to have been the finest in the world, with which the people of the Western country were familiar, the contractors built the new Wabash bridge entirely of wood, piers and all, with great hardwood logs driven as piles into the river bed for foundations. Unlike the later Terre Haute bridges, this first bridge left the eastern bank at Ohio Street. On its western terminus it debouched upon the old road across the river bottom, a sea of mud in spring and of dust in summer except in flood times when it was completely submerged and the ferries plied between the bridge and Macksville or the bluffs. The structure was a drawbridge to admit the passage of steamboats for points up the river, and the draw was placed near one end of the bridge where the deep water flowed in a channel.

As it filled a long felt need, the Ohio Street bridge was in general use from the first. It had however a very checkered career. Among its first uses was to accommodate the farmers whose great herds of pigs, which had fattened upon the mast of the forests on the western side of the river, were now driven to Terre Haute for the season of pork packing, the little river town's prime industry during the winter months when refrigeration was not a problem. In February, 1847, after only a few weeks of use

Mother Theodore noted that the bridge had broken in two, and a man was drowned. Some years later a herd of cattle from the Illinois farms stampeded upon the bridge, which was undergoing repairs at the time, and two children and a mechanic at work were killed, a number of persons injured, and many of the cattle drowned. One span and part of the draw were swept away in 1852 when a large, up-river steamboat, *American Star*⁴ collided with one of the piers.

Primitive and unsatisfactory though it was and often closed to traffic when the river was raging, the Ohio Street bridge served its purpose however for nearly twenty years. In the great flood of 1858 it was swept away and had to be entirely rebuilt, but the most serious accident in the history of the bridge occurred October 11, 1863, when under the weight of two wagons the draw collapsed and five persons were drowned, among them Francis Thralls's daughter, Juliette, whose elder sister Mary, Sister Isidore, was at that time a member of the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The funeral of this estimable young girl and three other victims of the accident took place in the old circular village church, after Vespers on Sunday, the four coffins filling the aisle from sanctuary to entrance. They were interred in the first cemetery on the present site of the college conservatory.

The bridge had not previously been equal to all emergencies, however, as in April, 1849, the *White Rose* had reached Terre Haute en route for points up river and had proved too large for the draw. An old pencil drawing in Sister Saint Francis Xavier's sketch book shows the first Wabash bridge, contrary to the usual newspaper accounts, to have been a specimen of the old-time covered bridges still to be seen here and there in remote localities throughout the country. The second bridge of similar construction was erected from Wabash Avenue or Main Street across the river in 1865. The impassable condition of the river bottom for months at a time when the temperamental Wabash was out of its banks suggested another improvement which was not realized entirely and to complete satisfaction until comparatively recent times, "a levee to make it possible to go to Terre Haute without boats." Mother Theodore referred as early as August 25, 1847,⁵ to this very desirable agitation, which began as soon as the first bridge was finished and to which the Community at once contributed one hundred dollars.

The little river town was growing very slowly. The population, estimated in 1847 at about twenty-five hundred, was only a little more than four thousand at the first census in 1850, but Terre Haute had changed considerably since the first Sisters had arrived there in 1840. In September, 1846, a post office had been established at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, thus obviating the great disadvantage of posting mail and calling for it in Terre Haute. The first payment for postage appeared duly in Mother Theodore's accounts, \$1.05 on October 25, with much larger amounts at intervals later. Prepaying postage had not yet become general, and the Terre Haute papers carried long lists of uncalled-for letters for which the recipients paid on claiming their mail. Some of the Sisters' letters con-

⁴H. W. Beckwith, *History of Vigo and Parke Counties*, p. 106.

⁵Community Diary.

tinued for some time to arrive at Terre Haute, and Logan called regularly at the small brick post office on Ohio Street of which William C. Linton had been postmaster.

The eighteen forties were a momentous, exigent, and fitful period all over the United States, offering a panorama of warring forces which had not yet reached their full development. The opening of the great West, the Mexican War, the rise of strange religious sects like Mormonism, and the immense increase in immigration with its concomitant deepening of religious bigotry were among the powerful subversive movements, some of which crystallized about 1846, an unrest reflected in the disturbed conditions in the diocese of Vincennes. The Erie Canal and the National Road had benefited Terre Haute, but the great impetus to the town's growth came only years later after the Terre Haute and Indianapolis Railroad was built. The canal had not been completed when early in 1848 the first discussion began of a proposed rail route between Terre Haute and Richmond.

The winter of 1847 had been severe, and measles, scarlet fever, and pneumonia were rife. At last however the ice broke, but in early March owing to low water, a fleet of steamboats was still detained at the rapids below Vincennes awaiting the spring rise in the river. By the end of the month however the steamboat wharf at the foot of Walnut Street was crowded, and the Wabash was running over its banks in many places. This was the heyday of the river, but the golden age of the steamboat (1825-1850) was now in the later 1840's on the wane. The small boys along the river bank however hardly knew this as they eagerly listened when the wintry chill was fading from the air for the hoarse whistle of the *Pink*, the *Fairy*, or the *Lady Madison* booming up the river and echoing through the forest. Flat boats were still seen running lazily south with the current, but the steamboat was king of the river. Nevertheless the picturesque old stern and side-wheelers were sinking into the shadow of the giant railroads which annihilated the steamboat traffic as relentlessly as though a cataclysm of nature had swallowed up the historic river. In 1860 the most colorful figure on the Mississippi, Mark Twain, left the river and went West to seek fortune, his occupation as a steamboat pilot at an end.

The newspapers of the time, conned like magazines by the Hoosiers, who often paid their subscriptions in coal and wood, are still an accurate index to the local tastes. They loved to read long tragic tales such as "The Melancholy Death of Dr. Wainwright from the Bite of a Snake," "The Tragic Fate of a Marooned Sailor," "New Orleans in Yellow Fever Time," and during the Mexican War calumnious tales of the "murderous nuns" below the Rio Grande. Dorothea L. Dix, the philanthropic English-woman, who toured America in an attempt to arouse sentiment toward more humane care for the insane, contributed lengthy articles to the *Wabash Courier* on the jails and poorhouses of Indiana in October, 1847. Foreign news occupied but little space, though the death of Chateaubriand chronicled in July, 1848, must have struck an answering chord in the hearts of the Breton Sisters, his compatriots at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. National politics had however an irresistible appeal to the Hoosier mind, and during these years the "manly voice of Henry Clay, the Sage

of Ashland, was thrilling the patriotic heart like the stirring peal of a trumpet." To the faithful Whigs, "only falsehood, fraud, and folly had kept him from the Presidency in 1844." Local political news was also of importance, and a speech by the prominent Whig politician, Edward Wilson McGaughey, was announced in mid-September, 1848, to occur at the Terre Haute Court House at "early candle-lighting." Free public schools, to be passed by law a year later in 1849, were already being debated in the newspapers, and slavery, a burning issue in political Indiana, was already occupying long columns of space. Bound or apprenticed children still perpetuated a sort of disguised slavery throughout the state. A bound boy to learn farming about this time had run away from his master who offered what could only be called a nominal reward for his return, one cent.

In the summer of 1847 the locust trees on the Court House Square were in full bloom filling the air with their delicious fragrance, and the picturesque old wooden hotel signs still creaked above the entrances, "The White Horse," "The Eagle and the Lion," and the "Indian Queen." The stores too continued the English custom of more or less romantic names, "The Spinningwheel Corner," "The Buckeye Store," "The Sign of the Lady and the Eagle," etc. B. Booth and Company maintained a general store, and Crawford's similar store, frequented by the Sisters from 1840 on, stood on the north side of the Court House Square, where the business of the town mainly centered. Beebe Booth had come to Terre Haute from Connecticut in the 1830's.⁶ Daguerrotype-making had been practiced in Terre Haute since 1843. The handsome four-horse stage coaches on the National Road from the East still swept with a flourish of bells over the old yellow bridge east of the city on Lost Creek. With cracking of whips and blowing of horns they left each night on their thirty-four hour trip to Saint Louis, through the streets "shoe top deep" in mud when the frost melted in the spring, where pigs and other animals still wandered at will along the sidewalks. Judge Huntington, one of Father Bede O'Connor's later converts, was on the bench and often spoke at the Commencements at Saint Mary's from 1842, when Mother Anastasie, then a pupil, heard him. Men like Richard W. Thompson, who later became Secretary of the Navy in President Hayes's Cabinet, were beginning to attract attention in politics.

In 1844 Firmin Nippert, a Frenchman from the vicinity of Metz, came to Terre Haute and with his brother Auguste as partner established a store known as the "French Store" carrying "dry goods, groceries, hardware, queensware, hats, and shoes," which attracted some of the Community's purchases. Nippert later became a prominent figure in Terre Haute business circles, dying only in 1889. The stores received "feathers, tow cloth, beeswax, grain, flaxseed, ginseng, rags, and bacon as cash" and advertised urgently for deer and other animal skins down to the house cat. Through many issues of the weekly *Wabash Courier* there wandered disconsolately at this time a "middle-aged small cow of reddish color" strayed away from her owner for many months.

During the latter half of 1846 and the following year Saint Mary-of-

⁶ His brother Newton migrated to California and became United States Senator from that state.

the-Woods also underwent considerable changes. Bishop de la Hailandière's proviso, when he relinquished any plan of further financial aid to the Community after the fire of 1842, that he should retain the charge of improvements on the buildings and the grounds, was now something of a dead letter in view of his written promise to hand over the deeds of the property to the Community. He had kept up his close supervision of the farm, the garden, and the general planning of the place, purchasing consignments of trees and projecting avenues until his departure for France in November, 1844. The bills for his purchases of this sort and for current expenses on the unfinished church were left to Mother Theodore, as we have seen. Now however with the ownership of the motherhouse to be vested in the Community, this anomalous situation would necessarily disappear of itself. We have no detailed description of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as it began to appear in these years, but from the diary it is possible to reconstruct at least in part the charming garden spot in the dense forest which it had already become.

When the Bishop brought the deed in July, 1846, it was patently unsatisfactory. Drawn in favor of those of the Community "who were in good standing," this fact alone and the condition forbidding any alterations or alienations without the Bishop's consent or that of his heirs, would have rendered the document suspect at once. As the site was diocesan property purchased with church funds, the Bishop's heirs were doubtless, though not definitely specified, his successors in the See of Vincennes and not the Hailandière family, who could have no legal claim upon church property.

Of the hundred and twenty-one acres included in the motherhouse grounds, the deed of 1846 purported to hand over to the Community only eighty acres. This left the grounds of Providence proper in 1846 to range from the church to Saint Anne's Chapel. The only buildings on this site in 1846 were the first convent with its two wings added in 1841 and the barns on the eminence since known as Saint Anne's on this side of the lake. Originally it had all been densely forested, but Mother Theodore tells us that in 1840 at the time of the second purchase two small tilled fields and an orchard had already been cleared and planted.

The erection of the village church and of the two wings to the academy undertaken in June, 1846, after the Bishop's promise to give the site to the Community, added appreciably to the accommodations and to the appearance of the school. The work on the wings, though not entirely finished had progressed satisfactorily, and the building was occupied after Christmas of the same year. Gradually now Mother Theodore began landscaping and beautifying the grounds, adding also essential improvements. Of these one of the most urgent was the wells. For over two years, as has been noted, the Community depended for all water supply upon the brook which ran down the ravine between the convent and the academy. Fed by an abundant spring which bubbled cold and sparkling from the ground at the north end of the property, long called from its first owner, "Smith's farm,"⁷ where for many years an old brick house served as quarters for the workmen, the brook ran in a curve down

⁷ The site in 1948 of the building known as Saint Elizabeth's.

the ravine where the church now stands and then east toward Saint Anne's where the waters of another abundant spring later dammed as Saint Anne's Lake mingled with it.

Now the graceful, gentle descent landscaped to add to the beauty of the grounds with the handsome arched bridges and the beautiful Grotto of Lourdes built in thanksgiving for the cessation of the first World War, give no idea of the deep, narrow clefts in the earth which were the early ravines. The brook measured only three feet when noted in the original survey, but Sister Saint Francis Xavier's watercolor painting of 1844 reproduced by Aubineau in France among the illustrations for Mother Theodore's "Third Journal of Travel," shows it very much larger and the ravine filled with water. For several years it supplied all needs for house and farm. On its banks below the convent was the log house where, under the gracious eyes of Our Lady of the Washhouse all the laundry was done. To this favorite shrine it was that Sister Olympiade wished to make the pilgrimage on her knees when Mother Theodore was proscribed and ill in Vincennes, in June, 1847, had not Sister Saint Francis Xavier pointed out that owing to the steep slope she would more likely have made it on her nose. An old sketch of Sister Maurice's shows Mother Anastasie as a postulant making soap from wood ash, lye, and household fats in a large kettle over an outdoor fire, on the borders of the brook. This brook had an abundant water supply untouched by diminished rainfall or the seasonal shrinkage of the river for many years, and flowed down the ravine until its course was dammed north of the church in the eighteen eighties for Providence Lake as water supply after the first powerhouse was built.

With the augmentation of personnel, however, need for an adequate water supply became imperative, and much needed wells were dug at several strategic points, one at Providence and others at the farm, the academy, and the priests' house. Old wells are not, except in emergency, as a rule destroyed or filled, and therefore some of these first wells may still be located in the very points where Mother Theodore had doubtless originally placed them. Three thousand bricks were purchased in the fall of 1846 for walling up a recently dug well at the academy. Rain water was for many years caught and conserved in barrels under the roof rainspouts, but a cistern for this purpose was dug and carefully walled up and cemented. Providence well, dug and cemented in the summer of 1847, may still be located near the circle in Providence Park where formerly a shady pool with goldfish and a wide ledge under the rustling oaks and beeches and evergreens made a delightful spot in summer. The barns and the domestic animals continued for some years to be supplied from the brook, and the two old wells still to be found, one under the great mulberry tree on this side of Saint Anne's lake, were probably not dug till much later when the first greenhouse was built by Père Michel on the sunny slope leading down to Saint Anne's well on the site of the old spring.

These were all originally, no doubt, the old type open well used in the Old World for centuries, near one of which at Sichar, Our Divine Lord had awaited the Samaritan woman. Eventually a pulley or windlass with one or two buckets came into general use. Persons who have never seen these old wells find them immortalized in literature as far back as

the popular medieval beast epic of *Reynard the Fox* or in the old song by Samuel Woodworth exalting the fame of "the old oaken bucket."⁸ Gradually, however, as pumps could be procured, they were installed at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, sometimes, as Mother Theodore recalls, "with difficulty," every available man on hand to offer advice or assistance, and interested Sisters looking on. The pioneer pumps were large, unwieldy, creaking affairs, but highly prized. A writer of the times describes them as made of wood, "long-handled, big-spouted, wheezy, and often out of order." Sister Basilide announced the first pump installed at the academy in 1843 to Sister Mary Cecilia in France. In 1846 the Bishop, whose Breton thrift sharpened his eyes for desirable equipment anywhere, remarked that "the pump at Mr. Corbe's house" was unused and ordered it sent forthwith to Vincennes. These were the days when Queen Victoria and other sovereigns performed their ablutions in water from the royal pump borne laboriously to their apartments in the royal buckets. There was much hewing of wood and drawing of water at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and elsewhere in pioneer times and much later.

As long as domestic animals, pigs and cows, roamed the woods, and at this time they still wandered unrebuked about the towns, fences were an absolute necessity. Richardville had spent much time at Saint Mary's in 1841 encircling the immediate dooryard of the convent and the garden with the usual rural fence of the period. The earliest drawings and aqua-relles, all from Sister Saint Francis Xavier's pencil and brush, show white picket fences with infrequent small gates encircling the priest's house and running along the ravines. The garden bloomed to the rear of the convent probably where Providence now stands, long rows of vegetables ringed as at Ruillé with flowers, the pinks, roses, and sweet Williams, sunflowers and marigolds, verbenas and bachelor buttons and varicolored hollyhocks, many from the old fashioned parterres of France and now to be found in the Hoosier dooryards. Near the house lilacs filled the air with fragrance, and in a shaded corner swayed a clump of lilies of the valley. Jean Delahaye had brought a good supply of seeds from France and had learned to cope with the variable American climate which, as Sister Saint Vincent said, often showed all four seasons in one day. The garden had been enclosed very early to obviate incursions from roaming cows and pigs.

Flowers and vegetables grew luxuriantly in the incredibly fertile century-old humus under Jean's skillful care, and he soon learned the pioneer practice of planting beans and melons in the cornfields. Turnips, parsnips, and watermelon were gradually added to the useful potato as the garden grew from year to year. The tomato, too, long known as *pomme d'amour* and feared as poisonous, was fairly common as early as the 1830's. The fragrant honeysuckle, the romantic *chèvrefeuille* of the medieval Breton *lai*, well known to the Sisters in France, ran along the fences, and the graceful morning glory climbed the porch and shaded the chapel windows.

Mme. Parmentier continued to be of untold assistance to Mother Theodore, and often enclosed little packets of flower seeds and tuberose

⁸ "The iron-bound bucket, the moss-covered bucket that hung in the well."

and other bulbs with directions for planting them, with the parcels of commodities, wide white calico for the Sisters' fichus, tulle for the postulants' caps, etc., which were hard to procure in the West, and which her daughter Adele's husband, Edward Bayer, expedited via Pittsburgh to Terre Haute in care of Samuel Crawford's store. Though the Parmentiers were experienced florists, Mme. Parmentier always insisted that seeds the Sisters might secure in Europe would be much better than her own, but she continued to send them, enclosing also books, pieces of silk and satin, silk and velvet flowers, ribbons, materials for fancy work, and other "useful articles." She was growing old, and failing sight made her letters, often written by candle light, an increasingly heavy task. "I fear you will not be able to read me," she wrote in the characteristic French expression. Her friendship for the struggling Community seemed, however, to increase with the years and was passed on a precious legacy to her daughters. Mother Theodore grew to depend upon "Monsieur Edouard" for many services, especially locating the boxes from Saint-Servan, which the Le Fer family sent from time to time, seeing them through the custom house in New York and routing them westward.

Early in September, 1847, now that the semi-completion of the church made the route toward it more or less permanent, Mother Theodore began planning to extend the avenues all over the grounds and remove the county road farther away confining it to the approach and vicinity of the village church and cemetery. The old North Arm road wound diagonally northwest through the convent grounds, so close in fact that the Sisters could see and recognize travelers on it from their windows. It probably kept for many years this way south of the present site of Le Fer Hall where a row of giant trees still marks its trace. The roads of the times were mere lanes and almost impassable in bad weather. "I have parted from my Magy," wrote Mrs. David Linton from Terre Haute in March, 1845. "She is at St. Mary's at school. . . . I still see her occasionally, but the bad roads and the river to cross will prevent my doing so often."⁹ The roads could be shifted at will, at least if they were on the convent property. The usual snake fence of rough rails probably skirted the new boundaries next the road at the cost of eighty cents a hundred, so cheap was the omnipresent wood. The dooryard and the garden had been cleared first following the two original fields and the orchard. All the early pictures show a little fenced lawn with a gate in front of the old Thralls convent.

In March, 1848, Roquet was superintending the erection of board fences "on the side of the woods." The garden or lawn in front of the academy, the children's playground, had also to be enclosed and had one of three little gates at something over a dollar apiece which appear on Mother Theodore's accounts. By June, Roquet was completing the fences down the front with a large gate. Only a short distance away was the academy's front entrance. Gradually this new road came into use connecting with the old North Arm highway which still runs west through the village. The white picket fence so prominent in all later pictures of Father Corbe's house belongs also to this period. Like the rails, the

⁹ To Mother Catherine Spalding, March 15, 1845 Original in Nazareth Archives.

palings were very cheap, eighty cents a hundred, noted characteristically in the accounts with their destination, "pour entourer Notre Père."¹⁰

The encircling ravines still proved a problem. Gradually most of them were bridged, but one or two were also dammed very early and eventually partly filled. The pioneers philosophically rode or walked as the terrain permitted, but as soon as circumstances made it possible, the Sisters began to improve the approaches to both school and convent. The first attempt to replace a bridge by a solid causeway of earth was undertaken by James Sheerin as we have seen. The bridges served an excellent purpose, and many of them very ornamental, are still characteristic of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The dams were not however at first successful, and Mr. Sheerin's causeway unfortunately, as has been noted, was washed away.

Some months later another more successful attempt was made, doubtless in the same place, and a second dam at the farm enclosed Saint Anne's Lake. While supervising the work on the first one, according to her custom, Mother Theodore accidentally fell to the bottom of the ravine where some logs had been left. For a few moments she was thought to be severely, perhaps fatally injured, but aside from a deep cut from the log upon which she had fallen, no permanent harm was done. She recovered slowly, however, and could not walk or leave her room for six weeks. "I hobbled to the sacristy," she wrote after three weeks, "to go to confession and Holy Communion."

During the months spent by Messrs. Marcile, Roquet, and Eluere at work on the new wings, other necessary repairs and improvements were added, among them a new shingle roof for the chapel at Providence to replace the unsatisfactory heavy roofing which had sufficed when the chapel was only a porch, and a *glacière* or icehouse to the north of Providence, which was stored in winter with ice cut from the frozen Wabash. A sun dial on a stone pedestal in a circle of flowers added a charming touch to the front lawn, and Jean Delahaye completed a fish pond at the end of the garden.

In improving and beautifying the premises, conserving the best shade trees was an important consideration, and the handsomest and tallest trees were carefully spared. Père Michel had been a practiced forester in his home in Alsace, and Jean had skill and experience. Then as now the golden blossoms of the tulip tree, "prince of shade trees," waved above every other. Tallest and straightest of the forest trees, it was the tulip which the pioneers selected for the lofty pillars which adorned the more pretentious of the early churches, among them the Vincennes Cathedral and Saint Joseph's Church at Jasper. Some of the oaks and beeches and the hard maples known to the Indians as sugar trees were carefully conserved also, but the less prized sycamores were permitted to grow lower down near the water. A number of evergreen trees purchased in Indianapolis were also planted near the house. Close around the clearing still for many years waved the dense forest. The slips and plants Mother Theodore had brought from France in 1844 had been carefully planted and watched, and a year later she could write to Ruillé, "The vine is

¹⁰ To surround our Father.

superb and the poplar has three shoots more than a foot long. I hope that next year we shall have from them three pretty little trees. We have also some hawthorns but not more than a dozen. . . . We consider them as relics from 'Providence' [Ruillé] which we will cherish with a respect and care which would make those smile who do not know why we value them so highly."

Several distinguished visitors found their way during this year to the little convent in the woods, among them the Most Reverend Ignatius Reynolds, Bishop of Charleston, South Carolina, an uncle of Sister Anastasie's, and the Very Reverend James Oliver Van de Velde, Jesuit administrator of the Chicago diocese, who later became Bishop of that see. Surprise and pleasure at the extent and good taste of the improvements were the reactions of the two prelates. Bishop de la Hailandière's alterations had been in general in good taste, and the wilderness had now by Mother Theodore's care been made to blossom like the rose. Father Sorin was another welcome visitor in the spring of 1848. He now had a "pretty octagonal chapel"¹¹ at Notre Dame du Lac erected to the honor of Our Lady, where her feast days and the month of May could be celebrated with becoming honor. A printing press had also been installed at Notre Dame upon which he was offering to Mother Theodore to print the English translation of the Rule. "You know," he had written some time earlier, "that your dear Community has the same place in my affections as ours, and I am ready now, and at any time, to give you all the proofs of this that you could desire."¹²

After Father Sorin's departure on April 14, 1848, Mother Theodore left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods by steamboat for Vincennes with Sister Mary Cecilia as her companion for her annual tour of the houses of the Congregation. She had been gone only a few days when the Sisters learned that Bishop Bazin was very ill, and on Holy Thursday, April 20, a letter from Mother Theodore told them that the Bishop was suffering from pneumonia or inflammation of the lungs, as it was called. Her letter did not betray unusual anxiety, but she thought the Bishop much more seriously ill than he himself suspected. At five o'clock on Easter Monday morning however a man arrived on horseback in the greatest haste for Father Corbe. He left at once. The Bishop was dying. "O my God," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier in the diary, "have pity on our poor Congregation."

Mother Theodore had reached Vincennes on Friday night of Passion Week, and on Saturday morning assisted at the Bishop's Mass and received Holy Communion from his hands. He was already suffering from a severe cold brought on by exposure at Highland, where he had been helping to plant the trees for the front avenue still to be seen there. A native of southern France and accustomed for sixteen years to the mild winters of Alabama, the sharp cold of January and February in Indiana followed by a cold and rainy spring had proved a serious tax upon his constitution. On Saturday, despite his indisposition, he spent six hours from two o'clock till eight in the confessional, but while there was seized with

¹¹ 13 septembre, 1848. S.M.W.A.

¹² 11 mai, 1843. S.M.W.A.

so violent a fever that he was obliged to retire to his room. Next day, Palm Sunday, Doctor Baty saw him and found him very ill. His pastoral letter was read at Mass in all the churches of the diocese, ordering the collection for the seminary. On Tuesday he was a little better, but pneumonia had definitely declared itself. He grew rapidly worse, and no one was allowed to visit him. On Holy Thursday when Mother Theodore saw him, she was shocked at the change in his appearance, and was very seriously alarmed. He himself however was hopeful, and the doctor was naturally encouraging. The Sisters, knowing their Mother's tendency to over-anxiety regarding those whom she respected and loved, discounted her fears, but she was right, and every succeeding hour made the fact more apparent.

On Holy Saturday she was called to bleed the Bishop, and seeing his increased weakness and his oppressed and rapid respiration, she realized how near he was to death. "Monseigneur is a fruit ripe for heaven," she wrote to the Sisters at Saint Mary's. "I have no more hope of saving him. How devout and edifying he is, almost continually absorbed in prayer! I have just spent a few hours at his bedside. He spoke to me of you all, for his thoughts are upon our Congregation. He said that the doctor still hopes to save him, but I have no hope. God grant that I am mistaken."¹³ In reality he had then hardly more than twenty-four hours to live. At five that afternoon she took his pulse. It was one hundred and twenty. The Bishop probably realized then that his hours were indeed numbered. He sent for the doctor and for Father de Saint-Palais and Father Audran. They left him at six, and Mother Theodore wrote to Saint Mary's: "My dear daughters, while I write you these lines our Bishop, our protector, our father, is expiring. Be calm, peaceful, resigned. May the holy Will of God be done."¹⁴

At seven o'clock word was passed around that the Bishop was to receive the Last Sacraments, and Father de Saint-Palais came hurriedly to the small chapel of the convent for the Blessed Sacrament. All the clergy of Vincennes had assembled, and priests and Sisters followed in procession with lighted tapers across the dark street to the Bishop's room. Eight Sisters of Providence were present, and Sister Mary Cecilia has left a record of the profound impression made upon them all by this solemn ceremony, the prelude to the death of a saint. Propped up in bed facing the door by which they entered, the Bishop prepared to receive for the last time the Divine Master whom he had served so faithfully. His eyes shining with celestial brilliance fell upon his sobbing children gathered to assist and encourage him in his last struggle. In a voice choked with tears Father de Saint-Palais reminded the dying prelate in touching words that the God of consolation was coming to him to strengthen him and to reward the labors of his ministry.

"After that our good Father addressed his children, as he said, for the last time," wrote Sister Mary Cecilia. "I was eager to hear every word, but I could not do so. Sobs and cries filled the room."¹⁵ In words of burning charity the Bishop said farewell to them all and gave them his

¹³ *Les Annales*, p. 70. S.M.W.A.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

final recommendations. "He addressed us in English. Oh, if you had heard with what ardor he spoke, he who was charity itself. We were bathed in tears."¹⁶ So labored however was his breathing and so great the exertion required to speak that Father de Saint-Palais begged him to desist and to give them his last blessing. Then aloud and distinctly he pronounced with great effort the words of the last benediction of a saint. "Mr. Saint-Palais and Mr. Chassé sobbed aloud. When we left, I turned back for a long look because I knew it was to be the last. His pale face was calm, his eyes raised, his hands clasped upon his breast, and his lips in gentle motion revealed the communing of his heart with his Creator."¹⁷ Sister Marie Joseph, Sister Gabriella, Sister Anastasie, Sister Augustine, and Sister Rose were among the Sisters who were present.

It was still early, but Mother Theodore had the consolation of remaining at the Bishop's bedside almost all night, and of being among the small group who were present at his beautiful death. At nine o'clock the seminarians were admitted to receive his last benediction. As his life ebbed away, the virtues of charity and humility which had always distinguished him shone more brightly than ever. Shortly after he was anointed, he called Mother Theodore to his bedside and said to her: "Assure all your dear Sisters that I tenderly love your Congregation. If I were to live longer I would not spare any sacrifice for its prosperity, spiritual and temporal. Assure them that such was my intention."¹⁸

She remained till eleven when Doctor Baty also withdrew, but she was too uneasy to sleep, and about three, with faithful Sister Joachim, she returned to the Bishop's room. He was alone with Father de Saint-Palais and seemed a little better. Excellent sick nurse as she was, she began at once the little services which thoughtfulness and skill suggested to make the patient, if possible, a little more comfortable. When he had finally realized that he could not recover, one momentary regret had arisen to his lips, "O my poor sinners." For weeks he had been engaged in hearing the confessions of some of the men of the parish who had been twenty and thirty years away from the sacraments. This good work had occupied him from the first days after his coming to Vincennes and had been crowned with great success. Now he would have wished to live a little longer to complete this work of zeal, but almost immediately his conscience reproached him. Henceforth, though burning with fever, he refused to allay his thirst in order to expiate that almost involuntary hesitation to receive the will of God. Now however he permitted Mother Theodore to give him a drink, but thoughtful as ever of others he told her to go to rest. A few minutes later, seeing her kneeling near his bed, he asked her not to tire herself out praying for him. "Some elevations of the heart will suffice," he said. "He added that he wished our prayers, not that he had merited them . . . that it was only on our generosity that he counted."¹⁹

His beautiful disinterestedness, his concern for those around him, and especially for the Community and its chastened and sorrowing Mother, who had suffered so much and who by his death was to find a new cross,

¹⁶ Mother Theodore to the Sisters at Saint Mary's, Easter, 1848. S.M.W.A.

¹⁷ *Les Annales*, p. 72. S.M.W.A.

¹⁸ *J. and L.*, p. 254.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

distinguished this noble-hearted Bishop to the last. Despite his raging fever his faculties were lucid to the very end. Seeing Mother Theodore moving about the room quietly praying and caring for him, he spoke to her several times of the Community. " 'Tell your Sisters that if I had lived I would have tried to do much for them.' The good Bishop counted as nothing all that he had done for us. He forgot that the last act of his administration had been to sign with a dying hand the deeds which assured to us the ownership of the property at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods."²⁰ The moments dragged slowly by, the Bishop absorbed in silent prayer or expressing his ardent faith and love in fervent colloquies. About five he called Mother Theodore aloud: "Do not call your Sisters for this painful scene; they would suffer too much. There is now no hope. I trust only in God."²¹ About six he grew worse and asked the little group of five persons round his bed, Father de Saint-Palais, Father Chassé, Mother Theodore, Sister Joachim, and the doctor²² to pray for him. Then with his trembling hand already cold in death he gave them his blessing again. At 6:20 he breathed his last. It was Easter Sunday, April 23, 1848, six months minus a day since his consecration.

The grief and regret at the Bishop's untimely death were universal in Vincennes, and throughout the diocese. The Sisters were assisting at Father Audran's early Mass in the Cathedral when the tolling of the bell in the tower informed the congregation and the town that all was over. "Protestants as well as Catholics are in great consternation. All weep as though they had lost a father."²³ The obsequies were postponed till Thursday to permit the prelates and clergy to arrive. Fathers Corbe and Lalumiere reached Vincennes on Monday night only to find the Bishop in his coffin. All day the Sisters were occupied draping the parlor in black, placing their veils near the coffin of the saintly Bishop to be kept afterwards as relics. An altar was erected and several Masses were celebrated there each day. In death the Bishop's countenance glowed with gracious benignity impressing indefinitely everyone who beheld it. The next few days were spent by the Sisters in draping the Cathedral in mourning, and on Thursday morning, before the coffin was closed, it was borne through the streets of Vincennes at the special request of the citizens, who formed a funeral cortege with lighted tapers.

The obsequies lasted three hours, presided over by the Most Reverend Peter Richard Kenrick of Saint Louis, in the presence of some thirty priests, the borough officials of Vincennes with Judge Ellis at their head, and an attentive and respectful crowd of worshipers of all creeds. The Most Reverend Martin John Spalding, Coadjutor to the aged Bishop Flaget of Bardstown, pronounced the funeral oration, after which the remains of the third Bishop of Vincennes were interred in the crypt chapel of the Cathedral to Bishop Bruté's left. He had ordered the space to the right reserved for his predecessor, all in ignorance that thirty-five years would pass away before Bishop de la Hailandière's remains would be brought across the ocean to repose in another spot next his own.

²⁰ *Les Annales*, p. 2. S.M.W.A.

²¹ *J. and L.*, p. 256.

²² The Annals give Mr. Benjamin Thomas as the fifth person.

²³ *J. and L.*, p. 260.

After so short a respite the diocese was plunged again by Bishop Bazin's death into grief and uneasiness. Father Martin wrote at once to Father Corbe:

My dear friend, I am writing these few words in great haste. Goodness! what sad news Monseigneur Blanc has just sent me! You had hardly begun to breathe in peace, and behold you are again immersed in apprehensions and incertitude for the future. Ah! how terrible are the judgments of God upon this poor diocese of Vincennes! How I should like to draw you at once from this doubtful position. You have only one man who will suit in these circumstances, Mr. de Saint-Palais. . . . After all, may God's will be done.

If you would be chosen, and temporal affairs would not be too much compromised, through charity for Indiana you ought to accept. You only need a little activity; and the good God and necessity would give it to you.

Farewell! I am ashamed to send you these few lines, but I am afraid my letter will not leave today.²⁴

We must not dissemble it, my dear daughters, wrote Mother Theodore to the Sisters at Saint Mary's, our loss is immense and can have for us the most serious consequences; however, let us take care not to become discouraged. Let us submit with love to the will of God. He is never more a father than when He afflicts His children. He has always protected us; if we love Him, He will never abandon us. Especially let us never forget that if we wish to die like the Saints we must live like them. Let us endeavor to imitate their virtues, in particular humility and charity, of which Bishop Bazin gave us such rare examples; for by the continual practice of these two virtues we shall be recognized as the daughters of this holy prelate, who was so humble and so filled with love for his brethren.²⁵

To Bishop Bouvier she wrote:

It is almost in the light of the funeral tapers burning near the mortal remains of Bishop John Bazin, that weeping I trace these few lines to you.

Yes, my Father, he is dead, this venerable prelate who in six months had healed so many wounds, and whose loss inflicts such a deep wound in the hearts of all those who have known him, but more particularly in those of his poor daughters of the woods whom he protected with such paternal kindness, and whom he leaves once more without a support and protector. How God tries our poor diocese! What will become of it? Nevertheless, we shall not cease to hope, for He who has protected us with so much love dies not. He will still protect us. Besides, we have the firm confidence that the one for whom we weep will intercede for us in heaven, where I hope he already is, or at least, will soon be. The sublime virtues he practiced with such perfection until the end do not allow a doubt of it. I should never have known him well, if Providence had not afforded me the occasion of being with him during his last moments.²⁶

On April 29, next to the well known names of the *Sligo*, the *Ringgold*, the *Richland*, the *Pink*, and other steamboats clustering at the foot of Walnut Street in Terre Haute, the *Wabash Courier* chronicled briefly according to the fashion of the time, an event of much more momentous import:

Death of Catholic Bishop

The Right Reverend John Stephen Bazin, Bishop of Vincennes, died on Sunday, the 23rd day of April, at half past six o'clock, A.M. His disease, we understand was pneumonia.

²⁴ 4 mai, 1848. S.M.W.A.

²⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 254.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 256-257.

Very Reverend Maurice de Saint-Palais, the vicar general, had been named administrator by the late Bishop, and as he was the general choice of the clergy of the diocese, they profited by the presence of the prelates to express their hope that Bishop Bazin's preference would be ratified at Rome. To the Community at Saint Mary's this name was also a welcome one. "He loves and protects our Congregation," wrote Mother Theodore to Mother Mary. "He had the courage constantly to show himself our friend during our trials."²⁷ "Lord, send us the one You have chosen," however, was the constant prayer of the Sisters at the motherhouse and on the missions during the period of over seven months of uncertainty which intervened before the news of Bishop de Saint-Palais's appointment was received from Rome.

Father Corbe, though he had arrived in Vincennes only after the Bishop's demise, took a prominent part in the events which followed. He wrote at once to Father Martin:

I had begun this letter shortly after receiving yours, but I did not expect that, obliged to interrupt it, I would finish it only by announcing the sad events which have delayed me so long. Our good and holy Bishop after a short illness has gone to receive the crown of the saints and has left the poor Church of Indiana again desolate. Our loss is incalculable. Although not endowed with remarkable talents, he had the piety and zeal of those whom God Himself inspires and whom He employs for His greatest works.

In his sermon delivered at the beginning of Lent, after exhorting the poor Creoles to return sincerely to God, he raised his eyes to heaven and spoke in a solemn manner to God: "O my God, if You must have a victim for this people of Vincennes whom You have confided to me, I am ready to lay down my life, and I offer it to You for their salvation." His prayer was heard. He worked zealously all during Lent, preaching three and four times a week, spending part of his time in the confessional, and on Saturday before Palm Sunday, after hearing confessions for nine hours [sic] he was taken ill. On Easter Sunday at six o'clock he died, or rather, he arose with his Divine Master to sing with the saints the eternal alleluia.

He revealed in his last moments a grandeur of soul, a faith and piety which doubtless had shone forth in all his actions, but were hidden in part by his humility. . . . All the *habitants* of Vincennes were there at his funeral manifesting the deepest regret. "He was a second Bruté," they said. For Saint Mary's the loss is very great.²⁸

The diocese on the whole was greatly changed by the brief episcopate of John Stephen Bazin. The tense atmosphere of fear and distress had gradually given place to a spirit of quiet security and content. The diocesan clergy had been increased by two ordinations, which had taken place on December 18, 1847, those of William Doyle, who had been in the seminary since 1841, and Bartholomew Piers. The former was sent at once to Father DuPontavice's mission at Washington, and the latter to the old church at Saint Peter's where he was to spend his entire sacerdotal career of nearly half a century. The steady stream of priestly desertions however had stopped, and some of those who had left were now being invited by their confreres in Indiana to return. Father Shawe after two years as professor of English literature at Notre Dame had however trans-

²⁷ 19 juin, 1848. S.M.W.A.

²⁸ 1 mars [30 avril] 1848. S.M.W.A.

ferred permanently to the diocese of Detroit, where among people of his own nationality his eminent talents found an agreeable sphere of action. Father Martin, domiciled since his return from France in 1846 in the vicinity of Baton Rouge, was reported to be returning to Vincennes with the new Bishop as his vicar general. His original engagement with Bishop Blanc had been only provisional, as he still hoped to come back to "the poor mission of Vincennes" to live and die there, but he eventually decided to remain permanently in the South. Father Benoit, who had begun negotiations to transfer to the New Orleans diocese, at once abandoned any thought of leaving Fort Wayne. The Bishop's interest in the seminary, in education, and in the sick poor manifested the trend his later labors would have followed. His zeal in preaching and in going in search of the lost sheep among the Creoles, and his long hours in the confessional offered a glowing example of devotedness and self-sacrifice to his priests and clerics and he showed them at the last how the saints die.

Saint Gabriel's College, saved from bankruptcy by the Bishop's exertions continued under Father de Saint-Palais's presidency assisted by Father Chassé, although the other Eudists never returned to Indiana. Father Bellier, who had left a short time before Bishop Bazin's arrival to become president of Saint Joseph's College at Natchitoches, Louisiana, later devoted himself with outstanding success to parish work as pastor of Alexandria in the same state, and as chaplain and professor of French at the Louisiana State College, where he was closely associated with its president, William T. Sherman, later so well known as General in the Civil War. Father Bellier died, esteemed and regretted, at Alexandria after years of zealous service and so poor at his death that a collection had to be taken to defray his funeral expenses.²⁹ Father Vabret never returned to America, but Father Buteux came back, affiliated himself with the diocese of Boston, and died there June 14, 1875.³⁰

In general the missionaries who had spent some years in America did not find themselves at home in France. "As for Europe," wrote Father Benoit in 1847, "you know one can hardly exercise the ministry there after having been so long in America."³¹ Before Father Chassé's departure from Vincennes for Rome in 1846, he had sought admission among the diocesan clergy from Bishop de la Hailandière, and he alone among the Eudists remained permanently in Indiana. He was closely associated in his later years with the Community as pastor at Saint Joseph's Church, Terre Haute, and as chaplain at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods where he died September 1, 1879, and lies buried in the convent cemetery.

After her two momentous and sorrowful weeks at Vincennes, Mother Theodore continued her journey of visitation of the establishments to Madison where she found the school continuing to grow and prosper, so much so that as Sister Mary Margaret had been in poor health, an additional Sister would be necessary. Father Sorin was in Madison a few months later and wrote very encouragingly to Mother Theodore regarding the school: "During my stay in Madison I had the pleasure of assisting at a part of the *distribution des prix* of your good Sisters. I saw with joy

²⁹ Michael Kenny, S.J., *Torch on the Hill*, p. 110.

³⁰ *J. and L.*, p. 95.

³¹ Benoit à Martin, 13 mars, 1847. S.M.W.A.

the evident proof of their success, and I sincerely congratulate you on the good you have done in this city.”³² At Saint Mary’s the Sisters felt that the long trip to Fort Wayne filled with delays and hardships was more than Mother Theodore was able to undertake in her poor health, but when she was able to be up, nothing could keep her from her duty. “I fear greatly for your health so poor,” wrote Father Corbe, “but on the other hand, it is beautiful to be a martyr to duty. I hope that God will preserve you and prolong this martyrdom.”³³

Mother Theodore was satisfied with the general progress of the schools. “We have found all our schools increasing,” she informed Mother Mary some time after the visitation was over, “the Protestant classes as well as the Catholic.” Financially, however, the missions were all still struggling, barely able to maintain themselves and obliged to depend for help upon the motherhouse, now also in debt for the erection of the new wings of the academy which had proved so much more costly than had been anticipated. The Catholic population of Indiana was still poor in general. “The schools called pay schools bring in very little. Many of the people do not pay a cent. . . . We get into debt in spite of ourselves. Up to the present we have been able to meet our expenses, and we think we can continue to fulfill our obligations.” With the confidence in help from above which never even in her darkest hours had deserted her, she added, “We have Divine Providence.”³⁴

The atmosphere at Saint Mary’s was quiet and calm in general during Bishop Bazin’s episcopate. Father Corbe, who had been removed from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods by Bishop de la Hailandière had been reinstated by Bishop Bazin at once on his arrival in the diocese, though only as chaplain, the title of Ecclesiastical Superior being suppressed out of consideration for Bishop de la Hailandière. He continued however to devote himself wholeheartedly to the Community and its needs. He had suffered much for it, and both Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Francis Xavier advert to this fact in their letters to France, especially to Bishop Bouvier, begging him to write to thank their chaplain for his uprightness and courage in defending the persecuted Community. How painful the circumstances had been to his quiet, peace-loving disposition is evident in his letters, and his correspondence shows also that despite the apparent calm and contentment during Bishop Bazin’s régime, both the chaplain and the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were still on the cross.

The reason for this state of affairs was known to both of them. It was the unfortunate aftermath of Bishop de la Hailandière’s tenure. During the two months that he spent in Indiana after his successor’s arrival, he had achieved two points: he had influenced the new Bishop to deprive Father Corbe of his title of Ecclesiastical Superior and to insist upon the Community’s holding the election for superior general, which they had evaded in 1846, and which could not now be carried out in a proper manner owing to their being unable to comply as yet with the requirements of the Rule. The hidden current of uneasiness in the Community and the uncertain character of his own position are reflected in all of Father

³² 23 juillet, 1848. S.M.W.A.

³³ [15] mai, 1848. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ A Mère Marie, 19 juin, 1848. S.M.W.A.

Corbe's letters of this period. His friend, Father Martin, was urging him to join him in the South. "But no; you will remain with your poor daughters, their guardian angel. You have suffered too much with them to have the courage now to abandon them."³⁵

This was true, but during these months the uncertainty as to the new Bishop and the future of the diocese and the Community added to the weight upon the good priest's mind. His loneliness at Saint Mary's recurred too as a heavy burden reviving his old desire to escape from Indiana. He respected his confreres in the Indiana priesthood, but to none of them could he turn with the complete confidence he had given to Father Martin. Plans to leave the diocese continued to fluctuate in the chaplain's mind as they always did when anxiety pressed upon his heart. His friend's consistent advice was however to leave Saint Mary's only in the last extremity.

To all the Indiana clergy the interval after Bishop Bazin's death was a period of apprehension and uncertainty. The rumors regarding Bishop de la Hailandière's possible return were still further perplexing minds and hearts, as he was still in America. Father Corbe's uneasiness dated back in reality to the beginning of Bishop Bazin's episcopate and had not been removed by the Bishop's visit to Saint Mary's, seemingly so satisfactory to all concerned:

At Saint Mary's we have had a visit from our Bishop. He has been kind and amiable and *à peu près*³⁶ satisfied with everyone and everyone satisfied with him. He is good, pious, and zealous, and I think will do well. He has already done much good at Vincennes. As for us, although he approves almost everything we have done, he remains in certain things under impressions received from his predecessor. . . . Like him, he is asking for an election for superior general, and this demand is evidently the outcome of the earlier one. The first was done to exclude Mother Theodore, and this one is to consolidate her, it is said, and to bring her more in harmony with the Rule. The Bishop does not observe or does not know that Mother Theodore, according to her letter of obedience, was sent as superior and foundress, and in that quality she was accepted. As a consequence, until the Community is founded, that is, is capable of fulfilling the conditions required by the Constitutions for an election, her authority cannot be taken away from her nor can it cease except by her death or by faults which would exclude her. An election would therefore be unjust by calling in question her original powers and would be, I feel sure, very prejudicial to the Community.

I shall say very little, however, because I am tired, and I need a little peace. Where shall I find it? Not at Saint Mary's especially since the Bishop has not given me the title of superior and since he remains under the impressions received from his predecessor. . . . Be very sure however that he loves the Community much and sincerely desires its welfare. I doubt not that in spite of everything God will bless his intentions so pure and so disinterested, as they seem.³⁷

Eventually Father Corbe wrote to the Bishop a clear statement of Mother Theodore's status as Foundress and superior general, and by this letter during the final week of Bishop Bazin's short life in Indiana the last shadows of misunderstanding with the Community and its chaplain were cleared away: "I had written to him . . . about the elections. He was

³⁵ Martin à Corbe, 4 mai, 1848. S.M.W.A.

³⁶ almost.

³⁷ A M. Martin, 1 mars, 1848. S.M.W.A.

satisfied with my letter and appreciated the reasons I gave him, which he had not even suspected, or he would never have proposed a change.”³⁸ “You are then superior general? You never told me that,” said the Bishop to Mother Theodore during her last interview with him before he was stricken with his fatal illness. When he learned from her also that her original letter of obedience constituted her superior of the motherhouse and of all the houses to be founded later on, he wished no further discussion of the subject. “Thus,” continued Father Corbe, “everything was terminated to the satisfaction of all. When he was taken away from us, all the other difficulties of the diocese were settled, and everyone was content. It seemed as though he was only called to Vincennes to rectify the mistakes of his predecessor.”³⁹

By the newly appointed Administrator of the diocese Father Corbe was at once named again Ecclesiastical Superior of the Community, but the weeks went on and no news came from Rome regarding the still vacant See of Vincennes.

Now, my dear friend, who will be our Bishop? wrote Father Corbe in an undated letter of this time. That question cannot of course now be answered; it will probably, however, be Mr. de Saint-Palais, now the Administrator. After Bishop Bazin's funeral Mr. Dupontavice met me and perhaps a dozen other priests to inquire whether we would wish to have Mr. de Saint-Palais for Bishop. I was the first to consent as I had heard that some were talking of proposing me. Convinced interiorly that it was beyond my powers . . . I gave my consent for Saint-Palais, and I went with Dupontavice to recommend him to the Archbishop . . . God will decide, and I beg of Him to give us a Bishop according to His own heart. . . .

At Saint Mary's there is no repose. It is very difficult to keep everything in order and to regulate all between Sisters and priests in a manner to give satisfaction to everyone. I repeat to you that I wish to leave Saint Mary's afterwards. It does not seem to me so harsh to abandon these poor children. I hope however that God will guide me and make known His will to me. If I had a friend near me, but no! I have no one any more in Indiana.⁴⁰

As the weeks lengthened into months, other names for the See of Vincennes came under discussion.

If it happens that Saint-Palais is Bishop, he will love and protect the Community, but it is possible that Spalding⁴¹ will be sent to us. From what I have learned from a good source it is even probable that our new Bishop will be a Mr. Wood of Cincinnati,⁴² a convert of some ten years, whom I do not know. I hope that from the confusion of events and ideas will soon emerge the one whom God has chosen . . . I am thinking seriously of leaving Indiana. I am restless at Saint Mary's. I have difficulties and troubles every day, and I am left to myself without friends, without society, buried in the woods. Some times I can hardly bear it. Yet how can I abandon the Sisters of Providence? They need as much as ever a priest who will be devoted to them and take their interests to heart, and such a one is not easy to find.⁴³

During all these months of anxiety Father Corbe often turned for solace to the geological research which formerly had formed so pleasant

³⁸ A M. Martin [30] avril, 1848. S.M.W.A.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ S.M.W.A.

⁴¹ Most Reverend Martin John Spalding, later Archbishop of Baltimore.

⁴² Most Reverend James Frederick Wood, later Archbishop of Philadelphia.

⁴³ A M. Martin, 8 juillet, 1848. S.M.W.A.

a link with Father Martin: "Tell me," he wrote, "do you occupy yourself no longer with rocks and minerals? I feel certain that despite your numerous occupations you are not without making a few collections. Though I have been sometimes almost blind with grief, I have however found some beautiful rocks." His main consolation however was in the daily increasing prosperity of the Community, which God continued to bless abundantly and to which generous, devoted Father Corbe despite his uncertainties and anxieties, continued for nearly thirty years longer to be a father, counselor, and friend.

CHAPTER XXIII

SAINT MARY'S FEMALE INSTITUTE IN THE 1840'S

"God has given us these young girls to guide to the paths of virtue. We must have for them the attentions, the affection of a mother."

MOTHER THEODORE

DURING all the first twelve years of its history Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was the only Catholic boarding school in Indiana for the higher education of girls,¹ as it is now the oldest similar institution in the state. The academies of the day were very popular in the United States and were nearing their peak of excellence and appeal. Not a few later became colleges. Indiana had however early turned to advanced education for girls in admitting them to the county seminaries established in the state in about half the county seats.² Public opinion however preferred separate training for them, but before 1840 when Saint Mary-of-the-Woods opened its doors only two private seminaries and one public institution for girls had been established.³ Later they became more numerous. At Fort Wayne "all that is talked about is the foundation of female academies," wrote the Reverend Julian Benoit to Mother Theodore in July, 1846. "The Presbyterians have secured a site. The Methodists not wishing to remain behind speak of nothing less than an establishment costing thirty thousand dollars. The Lutherans at a recent synod . . . have also resolved to appear on the scene."⁴ The public seminaries were usually day schools and generally disappeared upon the spread of the public school movement after 1849. Some few, however, of the private seminaries offered successful resistance to the public schools for a time. One especially in Fort Wayne was noted by Mother Theodore: "There is in that city what they call a Methodist seminary where they keep a large boarding school; this prevents the establishment of their common schools."⁵ Many persons, among them Caleb Mills, the great protagonist of public schools in Indiana, believed that secondary education was not a proper function of the state.⁶ Indiana during these years was involved in the great fight for free public education which led up to the first public school law in 1849, but which encountered determined opposition from various sources postponing its general acceptance for years.

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in the mid-1840's had changed considerably from the struggling little forest school of 1841. One of America's best known novelists, the late Booth Tarkington, has left us in the first pages of *The Two Van Revels*, an early work, a delightful picture of his mother

¹ The Franciscan Sisters opened an academy at Oldenburg in 1852.

² R. G. Boone, *History of Education in Indiana* (Appleton and Company, New York, 1892), p. 56.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴ 17 juillet, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁵ Mother Theodore, à Mgr. Bouvier, 6 janvier, 1853.

⁶ R. G. Boone, *History of Education in Indiana*, p. 62.

as she left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1848. A whiff of exotic Victorian fragrance mingles with the bracing air of the frontier in the passage which describes the author's heroine, Miss Betty Carewe, in terms drawn from his mother's reminiscences of "Old Saint Mary's" in the 1840's.

It was long ago, in the days when men sighed when they fell in love; when people danced by candle and lamp [sic] and did dance, too, instead of solemnly gliding about; in that mellow time so long ago when the young were romantic, and summer was roses and wine, old Carewe brought his lovely daughter home from the convent to wreck the hearts of the youth of Rouen.

That was not a far journey; only an afternoon's drive through the woods and by the river in an April long ago, Miss Betty's harp carefully strapped behind the great lumbering carriage, her guitar on the front seat, half buried under a mound of bouquets and oddly shaped little bundles, farewell gifts of her comrades and the good Sisters. In her left hand she clutched a small lace handkerchief with which she now and then touched her eyes bedimmed with the parting from Sister Cecilia and Sister Basilide, the old stone steps, and all the girls; but for every time she lifted the dainty kerchief to brush away the edge of a tear she took a deep breath of the Western woodland and smiled at least twice; for the years of strict enclosure within Saint Mary's walls and still gardens were finished and done with, and at last the many-colored world flashed and danced in a mystery before her. . . .

"They rumbled into town after sunset in the fair twilight, the dogs barking before them. . . . When the carriage swung into the gates with rattle and clink and clouds of dust at the finish," it afforded "a glimpse of a skirt behind a mountain of flowers, and of a charming face with parted lips and dark eyes beneath the scuttle of an enormous bonnet." The picture is completed by a few details, the "slender hand lifted to the fluttering veil, a hand in a white glove with a small lace gauntlet at the wrist," and "the figure of a carefully dressed gentleman with heavy brows and a handsome high nose who sat upright beside the girl," with the culminating information circulating in the old town of Rouen that "old Carewe" had brought his daughter home from the convent. Rouen, leading center of elegance and culture in the Ohio Valley, with its wharves, and warehouses, and packets on the river had the old-fashioned Carewe house on a broad, quiet, shady street with a wide lawn in front, shadowy under elm and locust trees, at the side an old-time long garden fair with roses and hollyhocks, with fine gravel paths and green arbors, a bronze fountain, and a stone sundial against a clump of lilac bushes.

This, with the substitutions of Elizabeth Booth for Betty Carewe and Terre Haute for Rouen, and with a liberal allowance for the light golden touch of the romancer, gives us a more or less accurate picture of a typical Saint Mary's girl in the late 1840's. Mr. Tarkington furnished also a side light upon his heroine's accomplishments when he tells us that "upon the morning after her arrival, having finished her piano-forte practice, touched her harp twice, and arpeggioed the 'Spanish Fandango' on her guitar, Miss Betty read two paragraphs of *Gilbert*, for she was profoundly determined to pursue her tasks with diligence." The novelist also notes his heroine's practices of strolling in her garden every evening and going to Mass "every morning soon after sunrise." Miss Betty, it will be observed, was more or less the glass of fashion and the mould of form in her father's community.

Interest in education for girls was increasing, and as a consequence

the second half of the decade of 1840 had witnessed a marked advance and improvement along all lines in the "Female Seminary" at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. It had chronicled also a metamorphosis of public opinion whereby the French school in the Vigo County woods had become to a certain extent the mode, and the best families in Indiana began to send their young daughters to receive the solid training in their mother tongue, the varied accomplishments, and the tone of distinctive and gracious manners characteristic of the finished product, "Saint Mary's girl" of the period. The enrollment was mounting from year to year, and the reputation of the school was growing apace. Mother Theodore still lost no occasion to visit successful schools and to consult educators, and her opportunities in France and in New Orleans had been exceptional in 1843 and 1844. At Saint Mary's the faculty was by 1844 adequate in number, highly capable and devoted, the curriculum on a par with the best in the Western country, and with the enlargement of the plant and the beautifying and landscaping of the grounds undertaken by Mother Theodore in 1846, the school was now drawing pupils from all over the state and from Louisiana, Pennsylvania, New York, and other far away localities.

The student body was mainly now made up of girls of fourteen years and over, many of them fitted for high school subjects. Immense stress was placed upon grammar, upon reading aloud with intelligence and emphasis, and writing the English language elegantly and correctly. If, as has been generally conceded, to use the English language with grace and precision is the first criterion of a cultivated mind, this was certainly a step in the right direction. The curriculum offered the cultural subjects customary for girls all during the nineteenth century, following the highest type of education of the day. Though solid subjects were increasingly appreciated, exact grading was still in the future. The general custom was to permit advanced studies to pupils of requisite age provided that their English foundation was satisfactory. The opportunity and the encouragement were offered, and each one responded as she could. Careful copying of selections from French and English classics, to be later committed to memory, and equal care in the composition of weekly letters home, which were corrected and afterwards copied, were inaugurated early and kept up for many years. Epistolary composition continued an important element in every class during the first years and later.

Textbooks continued to be scarce and highly prized, and were accordingly rarely sold but carefully covered in gingham or print, and made to do duty as long as possible. A small charge for the use of the books according to the needs of the child still appeared on the bills in Mother Theodore's large clear penmanship sent to parents twice a year, and as some girls could use a book for a long period without much wear and tear, a deduction from the charge invariably marked this fact. In addition to the American textbooks they used Dubourg's, Cardinal Fesch's, and Rosati's Catechisms, Lhomond's *Eléments de la grammaire latine*, Abbé Gautier's *Géographie*, Voulot's *Précis d'arithmétique théorique et pratique*, and studied French from the fables of La Fontaine and Noël et Chapsal's *Grammaire* and Fénelon's *Télémaque*, learning by heart the harmonious opening paragraphs on the disconsolate nymph Calypso mourning in her grotto the departure of Ulysses. The literary idols of

the day were Mrs. Hemans, Tom Moore, Grace Greenwood, N. P. Willis, William Cullen Bryant, and the French poet Lamartine. Lord Byron's works were mentioned only to be condemned. Poems and desirable prose selections were often assigned to be committed to memory as a penalty for infractions of school rules. Parsing Milton's *Paradise Lost* was the *pièce de résistance* of the advanced English grammar class. No occasion was too slight to be seized upon to train the young mind.

The second prospectus had been issued in 1844 during Mother Theodore's year-long absence in France and New Orleans, and printed in Terre Haute by Thomas Dowling. By 1846 however considerable additions had been made to it, and elementary, high school, and college subjects were intermingled in the curriculum. The school was now offering "Orthography, Astronomy with the use of maps and globes, History, Ancient and Modern with the use of the chart, Rhetoric Lessons and Exercises in Polite Literature, English Composition, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Botany, and Mythology," in addition to the usual branches. The Hoosier maidens, we are told, learned with delight under Mother Theodore's tutelage to trace the movements of the heavenly bodies and to recognize the constellations, to appreciate the majestic pageantry of the rise and setting of the planets, and the glory of the dark blue winter skies. Later Mother Anastasie taught astronomy with great success for many years.

Bible History was always an important subject in which the French Sisters shone. Mother Theodore had unusual familiarity with the great historic evolution of the Hebrew race, the prophets and their messages, and the types and forecasts of the Messias. Sister Saint Francis Xavier also had taught her younger brothers and sisters at home in France with a pin in the candle to mark the length of the stories from Scripture with which she regaled an eager audience during the winter evenings. The old Royaumont Bible from which all the Le Fer children had learned to read, was now conned by both Catholic and Protestant Americans. Sister Saint Francis Xavier was also an accomplished Latin scholar and had coached her brothers for entrance to the naval academy at Rennes. She now offered Latin, though as yet but few American girls were interested. The needlework and the music departments were by this time considerably enlarged, and the Sisters still pledged themselves "to use every means to form to virtue the youthful hearts of those entrusted to their care, and will be vigilant in requiring an exact compliance with the rules of the institution and the forms of polite deportment."⁷

Public examinations to which parents and friends were invited, established during the first years, had now become an institution, and weeks of hard study and drill by the teachers preceded the final oral tests in all branches of study as far as each class had gone, held yearly on the stage for one and later two days as the crowning event of the year. A program of dialogues in French and English and musical numbers was also presented, and the girls' work in drawing and painting, in embroidery, tapestry, and plain sewing was exhibited in the drawing room, at the *Distribution des Prix* in August. At the semi-public examinations and at the entertainments held at frequent intervals during the year, Father Corbe

⁷ Prospectus of 1844.

and Mother Theodore were always present and distributed the honors. The examination has always been the earmark of French education, and the faculty at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were well aware that nothing spurs a pupil to intense and sustained endeavor like an impending examination.

Distinguished men, priests or jurists, and professional men were asked to preside at the year-end oral tests and question the pupils who, having toiled for weeks in advance, in every case, as Mother Theodore recorded, "answered well." The grace and simplicity of manner with which the pupils had moved to and fro in Mother Theodore's presence in the little academy parlor in the first years were transferred to the outdoor stage built for the occasion before the larger audience of the next year who sat comfortably beneath the forest trees. Colonel Richard W. Thompson and Mr. Thomas Dowling had officiated earlier, but in 1844 the Reverend Michael Edgar Evelyn Shawe, A.M., presided and "the *distribution* was made with dignity in the presence of a large assembly who applauded the success of the pupils."⁸ On July 31, 1845, the Reverend Michael Clarke of Lafayette questioned the students who again "answered well." The *distribution* gave "universal satisfaction."⁹ Phoebe Ann Dowling writing on November 8, 1845, to her friend Mary Ann Brown in Washington, D.C., gives some details of the 1845 examination mingled with other school-girl chitchat:

Well, my dear, I suppose the first thing I must tell you must be of Saint Mary's for I am sure you are like me, always delighted to hear from "the Woods." Well, to begin at the beginning, the examination came off as most examinations do; some were satisfied and delighted, others not so pleased. I cannot help telling you what I got for one of my premiums. You remember a little workbox that Sister Basilide's sister sent her from France? Well, I got that. You may be sure it is doubly dear to me, having come from Sister B.

After the Sisters' retreat I went over to see them take the habit. Five of them took it. It was a very pretty ceremony indeed. I stayed over two or three days with the girls, and we had fine times you may be sure. Several of the girls stayed during the vacation. Mary Buell and the two cousins spent the week of the retreat with me. . . . The school is very much increased this year. When I was last over, which is about two weeks since, they had thirty-four scholars, and Mr. Crawford told me yesterday that three or four more have gone over since the school commenced. . . . You know I get acquainted very easily, and Saint Mary's is the place for sociability.

I suppose you have heard that Flora Mayhew has returned, also her little sister Elvira. Flora is quite changed since she was over before; indeed she is quite the young lady. . . . I suppose you hear from Sarah Webb occasionally. . . . Sarah told me that she had received a letter from Ann Doran and that she said it was currently reported in Vincennes that Mary Ann Caldwell is going to marry old Judge Moore. You have often heard Mary Ann speak of Mr. Moore. They say he is an old gentleman of some sixty years of age, but he is rich. . . . I suppose you never heard from Martha Warren. Well, I must tell you how she comes on. Martha has got to be one of the fattest girls about. . . . Well, Mary Ann, I suppose you take music lessons as a matter of course. They have some very good musicians now at the academy. There is a young lady, a Miss Lasselle from Logansport, who

⁸ Community Diary.

⁹ *Ibid.*

plays and sings very sweetly. . . . They have four scholars this year from Indianapolis, the two Miss Mayhews, Miss Drake, and Miss Hannah. . . . Lizzie Booth is still over the river and as smart as ever. . . . I suppose Washington will soon be very gay. . . . I should like to be there, for Terre Haute is the dullest place I ever saw.¹⁰

In 1846 the *Distribution des Prix* took on added importance. On August 5 a great number of parents had already arrived, and Judge Elisha R. Huntington, who had been appointed by President Tyler in 1842 Federal District Judge of Indiana, began the examination. Next day Bishop de la Hailandière, the Reverend George A. Hamilton, Vicar General of the Chicago Diocese, Father Corbe, Father Lalumiere, and some two or three hundred other persons were in attendance, and the occasion passed off "with great solemnity."¹¹ Judge Huntington's address was universally commended.

Every year had not the same outward success, though progress in every way continued. The next year, 1847, the Sisters conducted the examination, the invited examiner having met with an accident en route, and in 1848 although "everything was prepared for a brilliant examination"¹² a deluge of rain which reduced the pioneer roads to morasses greatly diminished the audience. By this time the younger pupils were generally examined on the first day and the young ladies, as they were termed, on the second day. Mr. Joseph S. Jenckes, a prominent Terre Haute attorney, who was conducting the questioning, kindly arrived in spite of the downpour. The *Wabash Courier* reported the exercises in detail and recorded that

the spacious hall in which the exhibition took place was well filled. . . . The examination was rigid and thorough . . . and the young ladies acquitted themselves very handsomely. . . . A bountiful and elegant collation was prepared as usual for the company in attendance, who were regaled during the intervals of the examination with the most delightful music performed by the pupils of the school on the piano and guitar accompanied on the flute by a very celebrated performer from Louisville. The little comedy performed by some half dozen of the young ladies produced much merriment and satisfied some of the spectators that all the good actresses in the world are not on the public stage. The Hymn to Saint Cecilia sung by all the pupils of the school very appropriately on the part of the scholars closed the exercises of the day. A great many very rich and beautiful premiums, mostly books, were distributed.

The premium list which took up the greater part of columns four and five on page one in the *Courier* of August 19, 1848, comprised in the three divisions of the school Writing, Reading, Grammar, Orthography, Arithmetic, Modern Geography, Ancient Geography, Astronomy, Mythology, Philosophy, Botany, United States History, Universal History, Ecclesiastical History, Rhetoric, English Composition, French, German, Piano Music, Guitar, Vocal, Drawing, Aquarel, Landscape, Maps, Embroidery, Tapestry, Marking Stitch, Plain Sewing, Application, and Order. Honor students were Mary Benbridge of Lafayette, and Elizabeth Booth of Terre Haute, who carried high standing during all their five years at Saint Mary's. Of the former and her younger sister Sally, Mother Theo-

¹⁰ *The Indianapolis Star*, January 9, 1937.

¹¹ Community Diary.

¹² *Ibid.*

dore wrote to Mrs. Benbridge about this time, "Your dear little girls are looking well and are applying themselves assiduously to their studies, particularly Mary. . . . Sally is a good child, but she will not make the exertion necessary to overcome her own will at times, especially as regards singing. This is a subject of deep regret for us."¹³ Sally Benbridge's name therefore was not among the music premium winners except as a third in piano. Maggie Linton, daughter of Mrs. David Linton of Terre Haute, appeared among the younger girls of the first division with the two Bretts, Honora and Margaret, the first of a later long list of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods girls from Washington, Indiana, and Eliza Fearn, daughter of Thomas Fearn, a Terre Haute confectioner, who entered the Church and later the Community and spent a long life of self-sacrificing service as Sister Mary Ursula. Other well-known names among the younger girls of this period are Mary McManomy of Covington, Indiana; Ruth Drake, daughter of the State Treasurer, General Drake, whose family maintained the Drake Hotel in Indianapolis; and Alice Hayes and Eliza Malone of Vincennes.

The most highly prized premiums were the first and second crowns for good behavior, of dainty artificial flowers fashioned by Sister Saint Francis Xavier's skillful fingers and placed upon the brow of the successful recipients by Mother Theodore herself with a motherly kiss on the forehead. Among the chosen contestants for this honor in 1848 appeared the two rivals, Lizzie Booth and Mary Benbridge. For the second crown Sally Benbridge, Rosette Peterson also of Lafayette, and Lizzie Vigus of Logansport had the privilege of drawing from a book in Mother Theodore's hands. The two classmates, Mary Benbridge and Elizabeth Booth were very talented young ladies, and the former was accomplished also. They stood shoulder to shoulder in 1848 carrying off first honors in Reading, Orthography, Ancient Geography, Mythology, Philosophy, Botany, Universal History, Ecclesiastical History, Rhetoric, French, and German. In English Composition Elizabeth Booth stood alone in first place, but her name appears in music only in second place in piano while Mary was first in piano, voice, and guitar. Neither had time nor inclination for drawing or painting, and in the various forms of needlework only Elizabeth's name appears and at the end of second honors for *petit point*. In Order and Application their names are also absent, but both won the much coveted honors for deportment.

After the distribution of premiums Joseph S. Jenckes, Esq., in compliance of an invitation of the Lady Superior, came forward and addressed the audience and the young ladies of the school for half an hour in a speech which was listened to with profound attention. Soon after the exercises of the day were over the sun shone out, and the clouds dispersed "giving token of a goodly day tomorrow," and enabling the pupils of the school and their friends to return to town comfortably without the use of the umbrella. The next session of this institution will commence on the 16th of next month, September, when it is to be hoped many parents having daughters to educate will avail themselves of the superior advantages afforded by this institution for conferring a sound and elegant education.

A SPECTATOR.¹⁴

¹³ *J. and L.*, p. 284.

¹⁴ *The Wabash Courier*, August 19, 1848.

The rewards given during the year, while they did not descend to the level of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's famous nut basket, which Bishop Bazin presented so graciously, were very simple affairs. Several now yellowed with age, treasured by their recipients and handed down to their descendants, are small bits of white pasteboard with sprays of flowers in water color. To Carrie Silliman of Rockville, Indiana, was awarded a small double card bearing the words, "To Caroline, Reward of Application. Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. From Sister Basilide" upon two scrolls with sprays of roses and violets drooping over them.¹⁵

Sally Benbridge Jones many years later described Saint Mary-of-the-Woods of her school days. She and her sister were in attendance during the early pioneer years, the 1840's. The school was divided into first, second, third, and fourth classes. Sister Mary Cecilia was one of Sally's teachers in English and French, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier taught her drawing and painting. Sister Therese was cook, and Sister Lucy was infirmarian and "had charge of the mending basket." The girls' clothes in Sister Ann's care were kept in closets on the first platform of the basement stairs, one deep shelf allotted to each girl. The convent wardrobe was very simple, three dark calico dresses plainly made for week days and a wool dress for Sundays. Sister Angelina gave music lessons. The old professor, said to be an exile from Hungary, taught also and later was succeeded for a time by his wife. Sister Basilide was mistress of the first class, and Sister Saint Urbain was a beloved and well remembered teacher. Sister Maurice when a postulant was Sally's rival in penmanship, a major honor in view of Sister's later prowess with pen and pencil. Père Michel had charge of the garden, and Mrs. Jones kept for many years a lampshade he once made for her. Father Corbe was chaplain and officiated at the village church near the circle back of which was the little cemetery where Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Seraphine were buried.

The Benbridges entered school before the wings were built in 1846. This new roomy and convenient addition was carefully planned by Mother Theodore to supply greatly needed classroom and dormitory space and was advertised in the *Wabash Courier* of September 11, 1847, as ample for upwards of one hundred pupils. Mrs. Jones remembered the first academy, "a two-story structure of brick, heavily shaded by the dense woods on two sides, with basement and attic." Marcile and Roquet were well-trained and efficient builders. They had to make their own trim and moldings as sawmills were few and poor, but their skill and ingenuity were at a premium in the Vigo County woods in 1846. Eventually with its substantial additions the classic structure set in a leafy forest bower continued to be a thing of beauty, and the tall arched portal at the top of the graceful iron-railed front steps was a doorway opening unknown vistas of refinement and culture to the daughters of the Hoosier pioneers. The dining room and kitchen were below stairs; above, a large drawing room opened to the left of the entrance, with an office in the rear. On the right of the wide central hall was the schoolroom for both study and recitation. On the second floor were two large dormitories with a washroom in the

¹⁵ Received from her daughter, Miss Kate Hammond of Greencastle.

corridor. A porch ran along the rear of the building on each floor, historic porch where every morning sleepy maidens, each with her tin basin, waited their turn at the old rain barrel. Some there were who even broke the ice at least in fancy, but in Sally Benbridge's day the water was brought inside in winter.

The furniture, like the general mode of life, still bore the seal of frontier simplicity. Some plain green chairs and tables made up the furnishings of the early parlor with four small French landscapes, one of a wheatfield, all with frames in wood constructed by Louis Alvey and painted white upon which Sister Saint Francis's facile brush had traced a design of green boughs and leaves. The time honored portrait of Queen Marie-Amélie, now a treasured possession of the library, was much in evidence. The first piano, for a few years the only one, was also installed in the parlor. The two long wings added in 1846 greatly increased the accommodations. In old age Sally Benbridge recalled the daily honor of sitting next Sister Cecilia who presided in the refectory, and on one occasion at an entertainment in the parlor she read "The Experiences of a Bashful Man" to such excellent effect that Mother Anastasie recalled it with amusement years afterward. "We used to have all sorts of ingenious French concoctions to eat, cabbage soup, and one day for dessert I remember currants floating in milk."¹⁶ Regular meals of good plain food were an important item always; at noonday dinner, soup, meat, vegetables, and some simple dessert were served. Best of all to hungry schoolgirls was the four o'clock collation of a large slice of bread spread with butter, molasses, or apple sauce which disappeared in a trice. Molasses and especially maple syrup were greatly relished by the pioneers and were often the first article of diet added to the original Spartan fare of corn bread and salt pork.

One of the treasures of the academy parlor of the 1840's was Father Martin's mineralogical collection presented when he left Logansport for Vincennes in 1841. He loved the diversified fauna and flora of his adopted country, its treasures of earth and water, its luxuriant forests, its picturesque lakes and rivers, and he was an expert collector of all sorts of specimens. This attitude was specially noteworthy and instructive to the pupils of the academy in an era when book science still reigned supreme, continuing even in colleges until the 1870's. His wide scientific tastes continually urged him to renewed investigation, and we have had occasion to note how well he knew, after he became superior of the seminary at Vincennes, how to inspire his friend, Father Corbe, and his pupils the seminarians with his own zest and interests.

Thinking to give him pleasure, the seminarians collected shells and butterflies to send to him long after he had left Indiana. "At Monseigneur's suggestion" in September, 1842, he offered to Mother Theodore a second gift, a collection of insects, and in 1848 when he definitively decided not to return to Indiana, he ordered his entire cabinet of curios and geological, botanical, and zoological specimens to be presented to the academy. With it went no doubt the jars containing preserved snakes and other gruesome objects seen by the Sisters in "his log cabin up a

¹⁶ "Sixty Years Ago," *The Aurora*, vol. 47, October, 1917, p. 287.

zigzag rail fence" in 1843. Bishop Bruté inaugurated it earlier, and other friends are said to have assisted in its growth, and some of the petrifications and fossils were of unusual interest and value. This gift collection formed in reality the nucleus of the museum at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, which has since taken on so extensive a development, and all during his later life Father Corbe continued to add to it.

In these early times many girls returned year after year to Saint Mary's, and thus became part and parcel of the school. The two Dowlings, Kate and Phoebe Ann, from Terre Haute were among the earliest girls from there, and so well known to all the Sisters was Phoebe that in the Community Diary one day in 1845 Sister Saint Francis Xavier in Mother Theodore's absence records a single item, "The return of Phoebe Ann." Phoebe Dowling Cook lived to old age, and one of a small group, was present at the golden jubilee celebration in 1891. The four Lasselles, General Hyacinthe Lasselle's daughters from Logansport, and Mary Ann Duret, daughter of the wealthy pioneer Indian trader, John B. Duret, from the same place, spent several years at school in the late 1840's. Mary Ann was baptized by Father Corbe in the village church on July 23, 1846, with Sister Saint Francis Xavier as her godmother, the first convert among the academy pupils. Her father, though a Mason for many years, returned before death to the practice of his religion, and her younger sister, Ida, entered the novitiate and died only on January 12, 1944, at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at the age of ninety-six, after many years of continuous service as a music teacher.¹⁷ Margaret Whitcomb from Clinton and Margaret Murphy from Darwin, Illinois, Ruth and Almeria Drake from Indianapolis, and a growing group from Lafayette also stand out among these early pupils. Several other girls of the 40's lived to witness the golden jubilee of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and were present on the occasion, among them Persis Holmes Jones and Margaret Murphy Cummings of 1842, Annie Keyes Cook of 1843, and Mary McManomy Loeb of 1845.

Many girls owing to faraway homes and to the poor transportation of the period spent their vacations at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. They had the simple pleasures the Sisters were able to plan for them, hay rides in summer, sleigh rides in winter, and dancing, with long bouts of needlework and knitting. Mary Ann Brown¹⁸ writing from school to two friends in Indianapolis, gives some sidelights upon this phase of school life:

We had an examination about two weeks ago. I got a premium for good behavior. It was a beautiful ivory tub with a purple velvet pin-cushion in it. It was sent from France. We have two weeks vacation now, but it is nearly passed, and school will commence again the first of March. The girls have all gone home except five of us, and I assure you we have had a great deal of fun. We had some sugar trees tapped, and we made some excellent molasses. We had so much fun gathering the water.

Our music teacher, the one I told you was once a nobleman, is no more. He died about a week ago with the pleurisy. I do not think there is any love tale connected with his life. His wife is still alive and . . . I think we will have her for a music teacher, for it is said that she plays better than he did. . . . If instead of visiting,

¹⁷ Sister Irma.

¹⁸ Mary Ann Brown, later Mrs. Browning, whose father was a member of Congress, left school in April, 1845, to accompany her family to Washington, D. C.

you would persuade your mother and father to let you come to Saint Mary's, I should be so delighted, and it would be of so much benefit to your health. You would have so much exercise, and this is the healthiest place in the state. Mary, I think there is no use in persuading you to come for fear of the dungeons you think we have. I have never seen them yet and I suppose I never will. . . . You must not be too sure of talking to a lady of a finished education. I am not quite a lady yet.¹⁹

The silver cross for correctness and elegance of manner was conferred on Sunday and worn by the recipient for a week. Father Buteux had congratulated Matilda Richardson upon winning it in 1842, and in 1847 Alice Hayes and Eliza Malone from Vincennes were wearing it by turns. Silence and order were still outstanding school rules, but the recreations spent as much as possible out of doors were delightful, especially in spring and in early summer when the long pleasant evenings succeeded the first hot days. The large lawn or garden in front of the academy was a fine playground where the girls enjoyed games of battledore and shuttlecock, graces²⁰ and marbles. The Sisters' feast days were celebrated with great *éclat*, Mother Theodore's always in Christmas week, Sister Basilide's in June, and Sister Cecilia's on November 22. An entertainment on the eve with English and French congratulatory verses sung to familiar airs and happy wishes all day long constituted the usual program. Long rambles for nuts in autumn and for wild flowers in spring and summer furnished exercise and hours in the fresh air in all seasons, except when it was too damp and raw.

Wild flowers grew undisturbed all over the campus and through the woods till the late nineties, and the heavy forest which shaded the academy building on the north and east had great clumps of the lovely purple wood violet, the fragile spring beauties, the rare woodland orchid known in medieval England as Our Lady's slipper, the golden dogtooth violet and cowslip, the Indian turnip called Jack-in-the-pulpit, the bluebell and the May apple hiding under its umbrella-like leaves, the trillium and buttercup, all shaded by the graceful fronds of ferns. Through her habit of drawing a lesson in character formation from contacts with nature the Foundress chose as the school emblem the rare white violet which bloomed along the forest ways to offer to the independent American girls as her ideal for them. Mother Theodore's Paris course in medicine and her experience in the care of the sick taught her to rank fresh air with good food and careful nursing in keeping the general health of the school upon the high plane which soon became in sickly Indiana one of its best assets.

In those Victorian times when skating for a girl was considered unladylike, to play the despised "fiddle" was unheard of, and one lived seven years in a house before she would presume to poke the fire or regulate the windows, the exquisite French courtesy which the pupils saw in their teachers was quickly appreciated by the American girls and imitated with varying degrees of success. Mother Anastasie loved to recall Mother Theodore's queenly charm, her gracious manner toward everyone, and her graceful way of doing the honors even to Sister Saint Francis Xavier's impromptu premiums. Stress upon the accomplishments so general in

¹⁹ Quoted in *The Indianapolis Star*, October 24, 1936.

²⁰ A game by which two or more players throw and catch a small hoop by means of sticks held in the hands. (Webster's *International Dictionary*, Second Edition, 1936).

America, which was a characteristic, however, of English education rather than of the more practical French training, added to this leisurely and cultivated approach to life. Even boys who "went away to school" were expected to be able to "warble a tune and play without their music."

Needlework was greatly encouraged by the Sisters who were all adept in this useful art. Every girl made a sampler. Sister Mary Xavier had been specially chosen for the American mission largely for her facility as a needlewoman, and Sister Olympiade among her many talents counted remarkable skill as a seamstress. James Roquet's white satin embroidered wedding waistcoat, her handiwork²¹ has been mentioned, and she could make a coat for Jean or Père Michel quicker and better than they could get it done anywhere else. She later spent some weeks at Vincennes making Bishop de Saint-Palais's new purple soutanes, his rochets and *bonnets carrés* or birettas before his consecration. The other Sisters were hardly less skillful and could do the highly prized *petit point*, the Gobelin stitch, and *gros point* especially, often from original designs. A handsome piece of *petit point* hangs in the old Fauntleroy House in New Harmony, Indiana, a group of three figures in clear and pleasing color, "The Israelites Mourning in Babylon," executed by Charlotte Samson²² at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1848. Dancing was encouraged as inducing ease and grace of movement, in the beautiful square dances, and as it was never seriously frowned upon in the Vincennes diocese, as we have seen, a dancing master was engaged in June, 1848. The guitar was still a rare instrument in Indiana, and it was only after scouring Vincennes in 1841 that Bishop de la Hailandière could eventually locate one to purchase for the school. The first piano in Vigo County some twenty years earlier was so much of a curiosity that some of the native sons are said to have called to ask the owner respectfully "to play upon the critter."

During these years the school was growing in numbers and in reputation. Friends of the Community were now assisting materially in its development and no one showed a more lively interest in the academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods than the Irish pastor of Saint Mary's Church in Lafayette, the Reverend Michael J. Clarke. His efforts for the advancement of the school redoubled after his visit in July, 1845, when invited by Mother Theodore, he presided at the final public examination of that year.

I shall be there, God willing, two days before the examination, he wrote. You will have quite a number from this place. Your present pupils and their friends here give a flattering account of the institution. Next year you will have an addition of pupils. Excuse my not writing in French, and believe me ever to remain

Your most obedient humble Servant.²³

The next month he announced Mrs. Thomas Benbridge and her daughter, Mary.

Allow me to inform you that some of our wealthy and most influential citizens are preparing to send their daughters to receive under your motherly care a suitable education. Mrs. Benbridge leaves here on Monday with her daughter.²⁴

²¹ Still preserved in the family of his grandchildren, the Wheelers.

²² Later Mrs. Absolen Boren.

²³ July 7, 1845. S.M.W.A.

²⁴ August 26, 1845. S.M.W.A.

A few weeks later he announced "Miss Hetfield, the daughter of Mr. R. Hetfield of Covington, one of our most respectable citizens." This was Ella Hetfield, who was followed a few years later by her younger sister Harriet, who as Sister Mary John spent over fifty years as a Sister of Providence, dying on November 14, 1912. "There is also a Mr. Johnston who leaves here in a few days with his daughter," he wrote, and in October he added some suggestions:

I hope I do not intrude by suggesting to you to make every exertion this year for the advancement of your pupils. In my opinion your future flourishing prospect depends on the progress the pupils may make in the course of this year. I know you take the best of care in each department, and by that means your house is great for the time and circumstances, and I hope will still advance in prosperity under your wise government.

In November, 1846, he recommended another pupil:

Allow me to say that the bearer of this is Mr. B. B. Jones with whom and lady you traveled, I believe, from Fort Wayne. He proposes placing his daughter under your maternal care hoping she may profit by your pious example and advance in learning. As I am satisfied on this point, I gave him all the encouragement possible. . . . He goes down with Reverend Mr. Sorin.

Aware no doubt of the financial distress which had so long embarrassed the school, this kind friend added to one of his letters a few words of encouragement: "All going are sure to pay."

Owing no doubt in part to the exertions of friends like Father Clarke, the enrollment during these years reached sixty pupils, a number maintained without much change for several years. Attendance was however more or less irregular. Indiana was still cursed with the debilitating malaria in the summer and autumn seasons, and pneumonia was rife in the winters. Thus, although the pupils as a rule were in much better health at Saint Mary's than at home, they were often late in returning. The custom was to receive pupils at any time, though not without protest, as absence and late entrance were acknowledged deterrents to progress.

Careers for women were far in the future in America, although the idea was never general as it was in Europe that they were inferior to man intellectually. We have noted the surprise with which Father Molony, fresh from Europe, observed Sister Saint Liguori teaching the elements of philosophy at Madison to her advanced pupils. The home bounded the horizon for every American girl however in the 1840's, and spinsterhood bore a more or less definite stigma. The Sisters had no thought then of preparing girls for a certain marked-out sphere different for individuals. All were prepared for domesticity. They were given in addition as wide an intellectual training as they cared for, the accomplishments which fitted them for society, and the needlework so necessary at that time.

Primarily, however, all were trained for the kingdom of heaven, and character moulding from the highest possible motivation was the fundamental objective of all their education under Catholic auspices. Engrafting upon the natural virtues the purer and nobler ideals of the lore of Christ, the education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods aimed at the complete training of the individual to which the French accord the term *education*

not content with the exclusive cultivation of the intellect called *instruction*. This mental and moral training against the highly esteemed background of religious atmosphere and supplemented by strict discipline and respect for authority has made the school for girls conducted by religious women one of the most potent refining, elevating, and correcting influences in the modern world. Acting subtly and powerfully upon the complex emotional, intuitive, and intellectual ensemble which makes up the girl's mind, the inculcation of religious truths supplemented by authority and love gradually elevates and transforms her entire personality developing "that refinement of mind and character which is the best fruit of any education." This age-old type of Christian education it was that the Sisters in the Vigo County woods were offering to their pupils in the 1840's, urging, instructing, counseling, reproving; solving the riddle of the universe for their inquiring young minds, and encouraging and attracting them by word and example to the devotion to the high ideals to which the Sisters' own lives were dedicated, their institution as yet only one small outpost on the remote American frontier in the great system of Catholic education the world over.

To the religious teacher every child is a study, a charge, a responsibility, a sacred personality possessed of the dignity of an adopted child of God, redeemed by Christ, called to membership in His Church, and destined in soul and body to eternal life, to be therefore respected and loved, benefited morally, mentally, physically, and assisted along the path to heaven. Not to be neglected, but only in secondary place, are efforts to educate the child for society, each in the measure of her abilities. According to the principles of Catholic philosophy, the child is composed of soul and body, the soul a simple substance endowed with two great powers of many-faceted activity, intellect and will, functioning diversely in different circumstances, but unchangeable in their status as powers of the indivisible soul.

In the 1840's in America the modern determinism, which emasculates education by denying free will and thus by robbing human beings of responsibility for their actions, removing the most powerful impetus to morality, had not yet been permitted in American schools to wither the child's approach to life. The glittering sophisms of Rousseau's *Emile* were not dreamed of in their philosophy, nor his cult of perfectibility denying original sin, his sentimentalism and utilitarianism since enshrined in American secular education. This tragic shadow cast upon the American school has been more sharply etched in recent years by the pragmatism of John Dewey, which inflicts an untold injury upon the child by teaching him that truth has no objective reality but depends upon expediency and harmony with changing time and place and person. Formal discipline may be decried, nevertheless it is possible and eminently desirable, and there can be no doubt that the mental powers *in toto* respond to definite and specific training just as the body is benefited by judicious development of its members. Though transfer of training may be granted only in limited measure, the fact remains that a mind inured to habits of attention and observation will assimilate a new skill more readily than the raw powers can do.

All these ideas were but little discussed in the 1840's, yet the present

day erroneous contention that the mind is only a group of tendencies with diverse activities called forth by particular situations had already been brought forward by the German educator Herbart, and America had already embarked upon its great social experiment of public education still unique perhaps in the world but hamstrung by its unfortunate corollary, the blotting out of religious training from the heart and soul of American youth. "The truth of course is that religion must form the basis of any education worth the name, and that education with religion omitted is not really education at all."²⁵ Right ideas about God and man's relation to Him were not minimized at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in the 1840's, and their influence upon the minds and hearts of the pupils was very great.

These facts were important especially as from now on, for many years the majority of the pupils at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were not of the Catholic faith. In the beginning, as the Sisters often remarked, the prejudice of their Protestant pupils was acute, and the independent aversion to any curb upon their own wills was extreme, owing, in Mother Theodore's words, to "the republican education they are given in the home." The American Revolution was an actual and living remembrance in the lives of their grandparents, and twisting the British lion's tail was still a favorite occupation, by many a frontier fireside. Gradually, however, their pupils were completely won by the wholehearted devotedness of the Sisters. The system, strict as it was, grew to be loved, and the leavening influence of girls who had spent four and five years at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was applied to challenge anti-Catholic bias in their social circles later in life. Indiana then and later has been fruitful soil for anti-Catholic propaganda, but to girls who had seen the much maligned religion at close quarters for years, day in and day out, no false presentations of it could ever afterwards have real weight.

To the French Sisters however who had hoped that their grand old Faith would make an irresistible appeal to their pupils, the small number of converts was long a deep disappointment. Mary Ann Duret's family was originally Catholic. Sarah Webb of Lafayette, Harriet Hetfield, and Eliza Fearn were almost all who entered the Church during the early years. Later the cousins Almeria Drake and Jennie Buell²⁶ were added to the number. Controversy ardently practiced in the first years was recognized as a source of dissension and gradually died out, and in the main, aside from the moral training they could give their pupils, the Sisters had to be content during the 1840's with removing prejudice and putting Catholicism in its true light.

This eminently worth-while task unfortunately was not always easy, and as Sister Saint Liguori had lamented at Madison, there was always someone to reawaken sleeping prejudice. As it had occurred in Madison, an address delivered at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at Commencement and printed in the newspapers was the occasion in Terre Haute and elsewhere for a renewed attack, designed to deter non-Catholic parents from sending their children to be educated in Catholic schools. Judge Huntington's discourse at the *distribution des prix* in August, 1846, contained very

²⁵ London *Times*, quoted in *America*, vol. 72, no. 9, p. 171, December 2, 1944.

²⁶ Later Sister Ann Cecilia.

flattering remarks upon the work of the Sisters: "Separated from the world by the most sacred vows, animated by the purest motives, they devote themselves to the education of young girls in the expectation of one recompense only, the crown of glory reserved to pure souls in eternity."

In Lafayette a reader, a Protestant minister, saw the account of the success of the school and the Judge's discourse and took occasion to warn non-Catholics against the academy, acknowledging however the excellent character of the education imparted. "All the Judge has said of the progress of the pupils, the kindness of the Sisters, and the regularity of the house, is exact. The institution at Saint Mary's is by its position, its domestic and literary principles, unsurpassed by any in our state. It possesses advantages I have met with nowhere else." The author insisted, nevertheless, that all this had but one ulterior aim, to attract their pupils to the Catholic religion. Girls of non-Catholic families had however still been told that the religious whom they saw for the first time on entering school would put pebbles in their shoes and shut them up in the convent dungeons, but the parents, though many had read Foxe's calumnious *Book of Martyrs*, hardly believed its lurid falsehoods. Attacks in the current newspapers were evidently another matter and were of definite injury to the school.

Organized religious bigotry was however in these years undergoing a change. It had too vastly overshot the mark in the rioting and convent and church burnings provoked by its earlier activities not to disgust the great mass of self-respecting and hard-working American citizens. A lull in hostilities therefore followed the deplorable outrages of the early 1840's, and the unfortunate campaign when renewed was undertaken upon a totally different basis. The aims of anti-Catholic activity and propaganda toward the discrediting and subversion of the Catholic religion and its adherents remained, it is true, unchanged, but the approach underwent a complete metamorphosis.²⁷ President James K. Polk was not bigoted. We have seen that Mrs. Polk en route to Washington did not hesitate to express to Governor Whitcomb her displeased astonishment at his keeping Father Weinzoepflen a year in the Jeffersonville Penitentiary when he was generally known to be innocent. President Polk's later appointment of Catholic chaplains during the Mexican War and his choice of Archbishop Hughes as peace mediator offended Protestants however.²⁸

Immigration also now contributed powerfully to swell the flood of anti-Catholic feeling as by 1847 two hundred thousand immigrants were arriving yearly, Germans to locate upon the Midwest farms and Irish to swell the Democratic vote in the Eastern seaboard cities where many non-Catholics bitterly resented their presence.²⁹ They felt that revolutions and famine in Europe were driving an undesirable element to our shores. They also saw in the Oxford Movement in England and its powerful repercussions in America, and especially in the widely known conversion of Orestes A. Brownson, open evidence of the uncanny and secret might of Rome.

The old violent calumnious approach was now exchanged however for

²⁷ Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 244.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

proselytizing efforts of mild and engaging character. Tracts in French, German, and Portuguese were circulated among immigrants of these nationalities, and lecturers and ministers were sent in considerable numbers to work among the poorer classes and peasants of the Catholic countries of Europe. In America activity was redoubled to enlist the support of the great middle class church-going Protestant population, and success was phenomenal. Public controversies between Catholics and Protestants which had died down, began to revive, and as ever the attack on the Catholic school was an integral part of the program.

Despite this growing animosity leading up to the peak of Know-Nothingism in 1854, the school at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, though injured materially from time to time, continued in the main to prosper. During all the years till September, 1848, the internal organization of the school remained unchanged. Mother Theodore remained in general charge. She examined the pupils on their first arrival, noted their possibilities, and kept a careful check upon their progress in science, reading, courtesy, and character development by visiting the classes each month.

During this time Sister Basilide was the gifted superior of the academy, and the unusual facility with which she learned English made her from the first a valued teacher. Her reminiscences of her youth in France and her novitiate days at Ruillé when Abbé Dujarié was still alive, and when as a sixteen-year-old novice she delighted to read to him in the *petit bois*³⁰ in his last years at the motherhouse, were listened to with rapt attention by her American pupils.³¹ Her physical and mental powers were unusual and her versatility not less so. The needle she could wield to perfection in all the popular intricacies of French tapestry and embroidery. The school was now offering also "French Embossed and Lace Work, Marking, and Plain and Ornamental Knitting," and in all these Sister Basilide was a skilled instructor. Among her endowments was a decided turn for mechanics. She was not less adept on occasion with the chisel, the hammer, and the saw than with the needle. Neat and orderly by nature, she could turn at once from some household task to a difficult mathematical problem, and she was an excellent accountant. Her ready and retentive memory was not the least of her gifts. When she appeared at recreation the girls flocked round her to listen to her animated conversation or to hear the interesting stories of which she had an unfailing stock. And who could tell a story like Sister Basilide? When she wished the girls to recreate in the open air, she had only to say, "All who love me, follow me," and all were in motion. Her cheerful, kind, and accommodating character won the hearts of pupils and Sisters alike.

The other Sisters on the faculty were hardly less successful. Sister Mary Cecilia was now too a highly skilled and much loved teacher. Writing to Bishop Bouvier about this time Sister Francis Xavier adverts to the excellence displayed by Sister Mary Cecilia as an educator. Her elegant and gracious manner not yet clouded by the undue severity of later years, her dignity, and her finished education combined to add to her great prestige as a teacher and counselor. An important member of the faculty also, despite the fact that she devoted the greater part of her time to the

³⁰ Little wood.

³¹ Manuscript Remembrances. S.M.W.A.

postulants was, until the elections of 1848, Sister Saint Francis Xavier, who was then named Mistress of Novices. Ambitious mothers were anxious for their daughters to learn to wield the brush and the pencil, for drawing and painting and ornamental needlework were placed only second to music by the art-loving Americans. Sister Angelina's health was already failing, but she continued her piano and vocal lessons to the pupils and the postulants and her labor of love as Mother Theodore's English secretary to the very end. The guitar was a favorite instrument, less difficult than the piano and combining effectively with the human voice. In all these departments Sister Angelina was a past master. The arrival of the first piano had been the occasion of a general celebration, and the purchase of a second one for two hundred and seventy dollars in December, 1845, was an event of not less importance. Sister Angelina was now unable to suffice alone for the rapidly increasing number of music pupils, and when Mrs. Hopkins, the second music teacher, left in March, 1846, another music master was engaged for the vocal music.

From time to time from now on persons of exceptional gifts joined the Community. In October, 1846, a postulant, a young woman of Irish extraction arrived, who by her talents and education was fitted to function successfully as a teacher at the academy where she spent her entire religious life of forty-two years, Anna Maria McGowan, named by Mother Theodore in honor of the great third century Pope and martyr whose relics were now one of the treasures of the Community, Sister Saint Urbain. Born in 1818 in New York, she was twenty-eight years of age when she entered the novitiate and had been for some brief time also a Sister of Charity. Devout, discreet, of refined presence and distinguished manners, she commanded a respect and devotion amounting to veneration from her pupils, all during her long teaching career. She was highly intelligent and had to a marked degree the love of study and learning so characteristic of her race. At Emmitsburg she had been Bishop Bruté's pupil in philosophy. From the beginning she taught the advanced classes, and after diplomas for graduation began to be given early in the 1860's, she taught only the "Young Lady Graduates." Lofty perfection and union with God were among her spiritual aspirations, and she gave great edification in old age by assisting in peeling and preparing vegetables for the kitchen. During these years of retirement she still retained the direction of the Catholic pupils. At the first general chapter of the Community in 1888 she was elected Second Assistant to the superior general, Mother Euphrasie. A short time later she was stricken with her last illness and died piously August 6, 1888.

As time advanced and the school grew, Father Corbe played an increasingly important role. The peace and security of his later years facilitated his students in photography and his devotion to drawing and painting. His weekly copy of the *Univers* from Paris was eagerly looked forward to by Sister and pupils alike. It enabled the former to keep pace with the labors and successes of their friends and benefactors, Veuillot and Aubineau, and to learn the progress of religion and education in their native land, and to the latter, when conned as an adjunct to the French classes, it opened an interesting vista upon French life and French customs. The chaplain added the best philosophic and scientific magazines to his

library, and they inevitably appeared in the academy classrooms with outstanding passages carefully marked to be read by the pupils or by the teachers only *cum grano salis*. He early began to act as final arbiter in all scholastic disputes, and knotty questions in religion were always submitted to his judgment.³² He called the girls his "little seminarians" and highly commended their interest in dogma and morals. No examination or entertainment took place without him, and as the pupils listened to his plain and solid instructions, admired the harmonious qualities of his sonorous chant, or enjoyed his foreign peculiarities of pronunciation, they benefited by the powerful influence which he exerted and which was destined to grow with the years.

The general régime of the school established by Mother Theodore continued in the main unchanged for many years, practically till the opening of the college in 1909. Thursday long remained a gala day, the only occasion when visitors were permitted. The morning was given up to lessons in the useful arts of plain sewing and mending clothes. The afternoon was free for fancy work, and in the 1840's at five o'clock a ramble about the orchards and the garden was in order with a visit to Sister Olympiade's pharmacy surrounded by her little plot of medicinal herbs on the edge of the ravine. The hour of unwonted freedom was a boon to the girls. The entire domain was theirs to range at will, and they came back with the crowns of their sunbonnets and their full bishop sleeves bulging with large luscious apples which the excellent soil and Jean's care brought to his young apple trees. These were the same trees he prized so highly that when plans of emigration were in the air in May, 1847, he was preparing to uproot and pack them for the voyage.

At six o'clock the entire school assisted at Benediction in the Sisters' chapel, to many the favorite hour of the week, for although High Mass and Vespers on Sunday were also *de rigueur* for all, Benediction had a special appeal for the Protestant girls. The atmosphere of faith and reverence of that twilight hour fragrant with incense and melodious with the music from the Sisters' choir remained for many a cherished memory. Convent school life in the 1840's was serious, however, in its demands. Class hours on other days were long, and after a generous recess at four, the pupils returned for an hour and a half of study before the seven o'clock supper. "Its pleasant and retired situation," now that the school was established, was considered by all the patrons of the academy a definite asset "giving to the juvenile mind that bent so necessary for the successful pursuit of knowledge,"³³ and the unrivaled health record of the student body gave ample proof of the salubrity of the locality high upon the bluffs beyond the Wabash valley.

In the 1840's at Saint Mary's the ties between teachers and pupils were very close. Isolation and the long school year made the young girls who made up the student body almost totally dependent upon the Sisters for motivation, ideals, example, diversion, intellectual and spiritual impetus. The courageous spirit of the early Sisters quickly built up a tradition of solidarity and amiability which was at once admired and loved by their pupils. Devotion to stern living, to duty, and to principle were in

³² The *Signal*, vol. 1, September, 1891, p. 3.

³³ Prospectus of 1844.

the air in America. Crime was almost unknown. The Kentuckians in particular who had settled in the Saint Mary's and North Arm districts were redeemed by an ardent practice of their religion from any resemblance to the saturnine quick-on-the-trigger type of frontiersman known in Illinois as the "Pike." The children were taught unremittingly at home by the word and example of their parents the necessity of courage and sacrifice. The convent, therefore, had an excellent foundation to build upon, inculcating in addition a saving sense of fitness, piety, consideration for others, and polish of speech and manner.

Of those aspects of training essential and taken for granted, one phase stands out as characteristic of the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods girl of the period. The charm and distinction of manner so characteristic of their teachers possessed an irresistible attraction for the young Americans. They assimilated and retained it as a privilege and an honor, the special earmark of the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods girl. The postulants too took it up as their inalienable right, emulating at once and even in some instances surpassing their teachers and models. To her pupils Sister Saint Urbain was ever a "cultivated Irish lady," and of Mother Anastasie it was said that she was the quintessence of grace and courtesy. Through Sister Mary Joseph Le Fer de la Motte the same exquisite distinction and charm of manner reached to later years, which had never known the foundresses, and appeared in Mother Euphrasie whom Bishop Chatard pronounced a queen in the kitchen as well as in the drawing room, and in Sister Ann Cecilia Buell and Sister Camilla Morrison, who trained an entire generation of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods girls in the Community traditions of courtesy and refinement.

Not only the Sisters, but the early French missionaries also, possessed in eminent degree the charm of gracious manners. Father Martin was especially noteworthy in this respect, and all those who knew him have remarked the majestic presence of Bishop de la Hailandière and his cultivated exterior. In his successor, Bishop de Saint-Palais, was revealed in every circumstance exactly what he was, a French nobleman descended from a line of heroes. The young American girls of the 1840's were, therefore, inaugurating a cherished tradition, and this above every other aspect of his mother's old school the late Booth Tarkington has chosen to immortalize:

I think that my mother's days at "Old Saint Mary's" were among the happiest of her life. Certainly she always spoke of them with happiness, and the recollection of them was bright and vivid sixty years afterward. Two of the sisterhood whom she must have held dearest of all, for their names were so often upon my mother's lips, remain in my own memory to this day, Sister Cecilia and Sister Basilide. They must have been women of exquisite manner as well as distinguished education. And they must have possessed unusual charm as well, to be so adored throughout the life of their pupil.

Something rare and fine was brought from France to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and none of those who were students there remained unaffected by it. For lack of a better word, I must call it "distinctive." The visible effect was a manner of simplicity and gentle dignity.

The students were well taught; they were really educated, and they were also given what we once spoke of as "accomplishments," for they "learned the harp, the piano,

and guitar," and acquired a fine accent in the French language, but what most distinguished the girls of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was that lovely manner they were taught there. And they were taught it so well that it was not a superficial veneer. Indeed it was rather absorbed than learned, and was something that came from within outward. And although my mother spoke rarely of this, more often dwelling upon her affection for the Sisters and the beauty of the place itself, the manner of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods is what remains most deeply impressed upon me. It always springs to my mind whenever I delve for the true meaning of "lady."³⁴

³⁴ *The Indianapolis Star*, February 13, 1916.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE IN FORT WAYNE

"Fort Wayne, there is a vast amount of good to be done there."

MOTHER THEODORE

IN 1818 at Saint Mary's, Ohio, was signed with the Miami, Potawatami, Delaware, Kickapoo, and Wea chieftains the treaty which secured to the United States government the New Purchase, twenty-two million acres of forest stretching across Indiana from the Ten o'Clock Line to the Gore and north to the upper waters of the Wabash as it flows almost directly west across the state. In 1822 the land office opened at Fort Wayne unlocked the "Great Gateway" from Indiana to the Great Lakes and offered to white settlement and ownership the wide-flung central portion of the state, for generations the beloved hunting grounds once thronged with buffalo of the braves of the Miami Confederation. The northern portion of the state from the Wabash to the Michigan border still remained for some time longer in the frail grasp of the Indians, but over the north-eastern waterways into the New Purchase at once poured a steady flood of American settlers from the older states of the East.

Fort Wayne, at least a generation behind the southern Indiana settlements in development, rose at the historic portage, or carrying place, in the midst of a romantic region of old Indian history. The location was unique and immense in its possibilities. To the northeast through Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, and the Saint Lawrence River, Indiana was linked with the Atlantic Ocean. To the southwest, through the Wabash, the Ohio, and the Mississippi Rivers thousands of miles away, with the Gulf of Mexico. Cherished by its Miami owners and long the site of a flourishing fur trading post, the famous portage lies today in the center of the city of Fort Wayne, only a few blocks from the century-old home of the Sisters of Providence, Saint Augustine's Convent. At its eastern terminus on a bend of the Saint Mary's River from time immemorial the Indians and *coureurs de bois* had lifted their canoes or pirogues from the water, and traversing the Saint Mary's again a short distance farther west, continued across the prairie on foot to the Little Wabash River which flows into the Wabash not far from Huntington. The distance is normally only some seven or eight miles but varies somewhat with the volume of water in the rivers dependent upon rainfall and seasons. When the traveler again took to the water he could now float uninterruptedly down one after another of the trio of great inland rivers to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico.

The strategic and commercial value of the location of Fort Wayne depends thus upon its topography. The Saint Mary's River rising to the southeast of the city of Saint Mary's in Ohio runs gently two hundred miles northwest to join the first or eastern Saint Joseph River, which from its source some twelve miles over the Michigan border descending southwest across the corner of Ohio, flows obliquely with many loops and bends almost two hundred miles into Fort Wayne, the two rivers

uniting there to form the Maumee, the name a corrupted form of Miami. The Maumee then doubles backward running directly northeast to the Ohio state line, nearly fifty miles on to the city of Defiance and beyond, to empty into Lake Erie. The second or western Saint Joseph River across the state in north central Indiana loops down from Michigan and back in a great bend which has given its name to the city of South Bend.

It was along these rivers that the French missionaries, fur traders, and explorers first penetrated the dense Indiana forests. La Salle was in this region in 1679. Fort Miami on the site of Fort Wayne was, with Ouiatenon near La Fayette and Vincennes, the first of his projected chain of forts designed to guard the Indiana fur trade from British rivalry. The importance of the Fort Wayne portage as the only break in a transcontinental waterway was early apparent to whites no less than to Indians, and as a result the region was often convulsed in the bloody warfare of the times. Every European war found its repercussion here. After the French and Indian War, the Ottawa chieftain Pontiac roused the Indians to deadly hostility all over the Northwest, and after the Revolution the influx of American settlers kindled this malevolence anew. Fruitless efforts to quiet them ended in defeat in the vicinity of Fort Wayne of armed expeditions under the American Generals Harmar and Saint Clair.

From the chronicle of the ensuing bitter contest two famous faces look forth, the pale copper-colored countenance of the Miami chieftain and warrior, Little Turtle, who was, according to the well-known Indiana historian, Jacob Piatt Dunn, the greatest Indian the world has ever known, and the stern features of his conqueror, the astute, courageous, and gallant soldier whom Little Turtle himself named "the Chief who never sleeps," General Anthony Wayne.¹ Up to Wayne's appointment no leader comparable to Little Turtle had appeared in the American forces. Though Wayne died before the end of the negotiations subsequent to his great victory of Fallen Timbers, his name is immortalized in that of the city which rose around the old fort near the field where he had crushed Little Turtle, his tribesmen, and their white allies. Convinced of the futility of any further resistance, Little Turtle now counseled peace, and during his lifetime the Miami did not ally themselves with Tecumseh's conspiracy, the last organized effort of the Indians to drive the whites from Indiana forever. The character, history, and exploits of Little Turtle, who died in 1812, which Dunn does not hesitate to place above those of the eloquent and resourceful Tecumseh, were only a memory in 1846 when the first Sisters of Providence arrived in Fort Wayne, but the Miamis were still familiar figures on the streets, and the Sisters at once came into contact with Little Turtle's tribespeople and his descendants among their pupils.

The history of Saint Augustine's, Fort Wayne, opens with a record of the foundation on the first page of the house register in the clear and characteristic penmanship of the Foundress herself, "The establishment of the Sisters of Fort Wayne was founded in September, 1846, by the Reverend Mr. Julien Benoit, pastor of Saint Austin's Church." Extreme penury if not destitution had marked the greater number of missions undertaken thus far by the Community. At Saint Francisville and Saint

¹ Many likenesses of Wayne are extant, but the only portrait of Little Turtle painted by Gilbert Stuart was lost when the British burned the Capitol in Washington in 1814.

Peter's the Sisters had practically starved among a group of impoverished Catholic settlers, willing but totally unable to support them. At Vincennes, too, though better located in the episcopal city, the Sisters experienced hardships so serious as to occasion the pained surprise of Mother Theodore when she stopped there en route to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from New Orleans after her return from France in 1844, and eventually to cause the death of Sister Seraphine. No complaint came from the Sisters, who found themselves only too happy to share the rough life of the frontier with its sharp tests of physical resistance and mental endurance. In Madison and Jasper conditions were better, but Mother Theodore had been for some time convinced of the absolute necessity of providing adequate food and housing on the missions if the Community was to endure.

From this conviction sprang her insistence upon definite arrangements safeguarding the lives and the health of the Sisters preliminary to opening any new houses. To her modest requirements, however, Father Benoit did not at once accede. *Pourparlers* had been on, nevertheless, for some time and Mother Theodore knew that his most cherished dream was to procure Sisters of Providence for his parish. Fort Wayne was growing rapidly, as the Wabash and Erie Canal, finished in 1841 from Fort Wayne to Toledo, brought a steady tide of immigrants, many of them Catholics, in increasing numbers to northern Indiana. Father Benoit's early years in Fort Wayne had been harassed by financial troubles, and his repeated attempts to obtain a few thousand dollars from the funds which Bishop de la Hailandière received from France from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith had been fruitless.

His efforts for the education of the children of his parish, however, were only redoubled. "I can do nothing without schools," he wrote to Father Martin at Vincennes.² "I have just bought four lots at my own expense on which is the house which I am occupying. I am also in the market for two other lots with a house for the Brothers. Next week I will begin to build a brick house for the Sisters."³ By the following May this latter house was under construction. The congregation could contribute, however, only six hundred dollars to its estimated cost of four thousand. "Where shall I find the missing \$3,600 [sic] if I do nothing to procure it?" lamented the pastor. The lots purchased before his arrival in Fort Wayne, half of the present Cathedral Square, were already the site of the school and the priest's and schoolmaster's houses. These early acquisitions were the first of a number of real estate transactions resulting later in handsome profits, all eventually to be expended for the advancement of religion and the welfare of the Catholic people of Fort Wayne.

Father Benoit's financial acumen enabled him eventually to solve with comparative ease the difficulties of acquiring desirable sites for his enterprises and erecting suitable buildings, but obstacles to his plans to secure Sisters now arose from another source. Before leaving for France in November, 1844, Bishop de la Hailandière had directed him to take no further steps in the matter, and during 1845 he had suspended all negotiations with Mother Theodore. A year later, however, on his return from

² 1 juillet, 1843. S.M.W.A.¹

³ 19 juillet, 1843. S.M.W.A.

Europe the Bishop was willing for Father Benoit to "write to Terre Haute" again. In his letter of November 14, 1845, the energetic pastor details to Mother Theodore the arrangements he has made, "the best built house in the diocese, large enough for forty boarders; two hundred dollars or at most three hundred for furnishings; a garden of two acres, all worth about eight thousand dollars. I would like to meet your conditions stated in your letter of last year, but as I am already burdened with a considerable debt, I cannot contract any new obligations.⁴

Signed "Your very obedient servant" in the clear, even penmanship of "Julien Benoit, Missionary," with the customary individual *parafe* or flourish, this matter-of-fact document, the beginning of a long correspondence, is striking mainly for its marked difference from his letters of a year or two later. Mr. Benoit, as according to custom he was always called at this time, was an astute and clever judge of character. His first personal contacts with Mother Theodore after the foundation of Fort Wayne revealed to him that he was in the presence of a saint. In her crystal clear glance he read at once the depths of that candid, upright, and courageous soul on fire with the love of God. The decision to open Fort Wayne had been a milestone marking a brief lull in the Community's sorrows and difficulties, but the year 1846 was a period of continued grief for Mother Theodore. It was a painful year for Father Benoit also. His own future prospects were clouded by uncertainty. His friend, Father Martin, was leaving the diocese, and the confusion and unrest among the Indiana clergy were at their peak. The plight of the Community was too well known for Father Benoit to be ignorant of the heavy cross which Mother Theodore was bearing so bravely when she came to Fort Wayne in September, 1846, and he at once accorded to her the respect and veneration which the spectacle of exalted virtue rarely fails to command.

A year earlier, however, the prospects for the foundation had seemed poor indeed. The house was in readiness, and fifteen boarding pupils were waiting. The Bishop was now willing, and the pastor was anxious indeed to begin but still felt too deeply in debt to obligate himself to support the school. Mother Theodore had proposed to sell Sister Mary Cecilia's property at Chesterton inherited from her father, and devote the proceeds to Father Benoit's school. He knew, however, that the success of this procedure was questionable, and he referred the matter anew to the Bishop, hoping doubtless but in vain for "some crumbs from the Episcopal table." Mother Theodore also sent his letter to Monseigneur de la Hailandière with no better success. "It is not within my province to answer," was the Bishop's reply written along the edge of the letter. "If you wish a decision, observe your Constitutions, Art. 101,"⁵ a passage which directed Mother Theodore to secure the consent of the Council and the Ecclesiastical Superior, a matter which had been attended to long before.

Nothing therefore remained but for the two principals in the transaction to arrange the matter as best they could, and there seems no doubt that Mother Theodore, burdened as she was with the costly construction of the two new wings at the academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, finally agreed to make the foundation and trust to Providence for extra funds to

⁴ S.M.W.A.

⁵ 22 novembre, 1845. S.M.W.A.

support it. "After the retreat we will take a new mission, Fort Wayne, in the northern part of the State," she wrote to Bishop Bouvier in July. "They intend to give us a brick house and a small meadow. That is all they can do."^o

Circumstances, however, soon proved that all anxiety as to the resources and the success of Saint Augustine's had been needless. The school, adequately housed and staffed, at once became self-supporting. In addition it was soon able to contribute to the upkeep of less prosperous houses and remained for many years the most flourishing and successful of the missions of the Sisters of Providence. As the center of a rapidly developing Catholic region, Fort Wayne opened the entire northern section of Indiana to the zeal of the Sisters of Providence. This immense tangled thicket of swamp and forest pierced with a few wandering trails over which the red man ranged on the hunt or the war party, which was the New Purchase in 1818, was now in 1846 beginning to be dotted with peaceful farms, and towns were thriving along the river and the canal. Eventually this northern region of the great interior area of Indiana contributed generously of its daughters to people the schools of the Sisters of Providence and to carry on their work.

Once arrived in Fort Wayne, in the early days of September, 1846, Mother Theodore found that the generous pastor had made preparations for the Sisters far beyond her expectations. The comfortable brick house completely furnished and surrounded by ample grounds was fully in readiness for the school to open. Beset so often elsewhere with fear and anxiety for the welfare and the very lives of her daughters, Mother Theodore expresses the sentiments of her grateful heart toward the devoted and thoughtful pastor upon the same opening page of the house book cited above: "To testify her gratitude to this generous benefactor, the superior general obliges herself and her Sisters residing now at Fort Wayne and those who will come after them to recite every day one Our Father and Hail Mary for the spiritual and temporal needs of their founder." In addition she directed that two Masses were to be offered at his death and two Communions from each Sister with the *De Profundis* for eight days, and a Mass with general Communion at the motherhouse. This document still extant was signed September 4, 1846, and is one of the first in which the Foundress departed from her native French, which she continued to use in the Community diary and in all her accounts and most of her correspondence, to employ the English language which she had now long written and spoken with considerable facility and correctness. This was in order to establish at the very outset their obligations toward "our benefactor the Reverend Mr. Benoit," as she loved to call him. A few days later on September 7, the pastor handed over to the following:

Sister Saint Theodore, alias Anna Theresa Guérin, Sister Saint Vincent, alias Victoire Gagé, Sister Saint Francis Xavier, alias Irma le Fer de la Motte, Sister Saint Mary de Liguori [sic] alias Louisa Tiercin, Sister Mary Cecilia, alias Eleanore Bailly, Sister Mary Joseph, alias Josephine Parielan [sic] Sister Saint Augustine [sic] alias Mary Anna Graham, Trustees of the Academy of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Vigo County, Indiana, and to their lawful successors in office, the house and its furnishings, 12 mahogany chairs, 12 fine chairs, 6 common chairs, 2 mahogany

^o *J. and L.*, p. 208.

centre tables, 2 mahogany side tables, 1 mahogany sofa, 3 carpets for 3 rooms and stairs, 22 window curtains, 4 bedsteads and bedding, a cooking stove⁷

and a full assortment of plates, dishes, knives and forks, and kitchen implements. The house was thus completely equipped. The pastor had already shown his generous intentions in this regard, however, during the previous summer:

Doing all you can, good and excellent Mother, for the good of my mission, I would be too ungrateful, he wrote, if on my side I did not exert all my efforts to be useful to your work. I have hitherto applied to Father Sorin but why? Because your difficulties with His Lordship rendered very precarious on your own avowal your continued existence in Indiana. This is now no longer the case. You are really *our Sisters*, and be convinced I will treat you as such. On your part begin by praying for me.⁸

The foundresses of Saint Augustine's, Sister Mary Magdalen, Sister Catherine, and Sister Caroline had left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on August 24 for the long circuitous journey to Fort Wayne. As Sister Basilide and Mother Theodore accompanied them, the group numbered five. The Wabash and Erie Canal, inching southward through Fountain, Parke, and Vigo Counties from Covington, did not reach Terre Haute till 1849, and although the light steamers *Pink* and *American* had been plying above Terre Haute, in late August there was no question of steamboat navigation upon the upper reaches of the summer-shrunken Wabash. The party of Sisters therefore took the stage north along the road to Covington. By 1842 the canal packets were running daily through from Lafayette to Toledo in two days and a half, and by 1846 the western terminus of the canal had been pushed forward to Covington where the "big ditch" turned to follow the course of the Wabash in an almost straight line south toward Terre Haute. At Covington the Sisters could shift to the canal therefore for the remainder of the journey to Fort Wayne. In all it consumed the greater part of a week of slow and wearisome travel and long delays, and cost them \$40.50.⁹

Though after October, 1849, they usually traveled on a canal packet boat, until that time they reserved places in the stage to leave Terre Haute very early in the morning, stopped for breakfast some miles farther on, and ten miles still farther spent the night at Armysburg, an ephemeral canal town on Raccoon Creek in Parke County, where General William Henry Harrison is said to have camped with his army of regulars, Kentucky and Indiana woodsmen, and friendly Indians in October, 1811, on his way to the battle of Tippecanoe. The canal paralleled the old pioneer road on their way north, and the travelers soon passed the mile-square grant of the Catholic Indian agent and interpreter, Christmas Dagenet and his Brotherton Indian convert wife, Mary Ann Isaacs, who had been baptized with their children by Father Buteux at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1837.

After crossing the famous Ten o'Clock Line the party reached Covington, the home of the McManomy and Hetfield families whose daughters were pupils at Saint Mary's during all these years. The Hetfields were

⁷ Fort Wayne Ledger. S.M.W.A.

⁸ A Mother Theodore, 17 juillet, 1846. S.M.W.A.

⁹ Fort Wayne Ledger. S.M.W.A.

not Catholics, although Robert Hetfield's daughter Harriet¹⁰ entered the Church and later also the Community, as we have seen. The family had several daughters and wards at Saint Mary's from year to year, and there were four McManomys, one of whom, Isabella McManomy Sangster, lived to advanced age, dying in Covington in 1936. Covington was noted during these mid-nineteenth century years when the Sisters passed through several times a year, as the home of three distinguished Hoosiers, prominent in national affairs, the brilliant and unfortunate Edward A. Hannegan, United States Senator and minister to Russia; another United States Senator, Daniel W. Voorhees, the "Tall Sycamore of the Wabash," whose daughter Hallie was a pupil at Saint Mary's in the 1860's, and General Lew Wallace, who wrote in the old river and canal town of Covington his historical novel *The Fair God* on the conquest of Mexico by Cortez, motivated by his experiences in the Mexican War.

After Covington the next stop was at Lafayette farther east towards the head waters of the Wabash as it crosses the state. Here the party passed the site of Tippecanoe and of the old fort and the Indian village of Ouiatenon where François de Vincennes was in command among the Weas before he built the post on the lower Wabash which now bears his name. At Lafayette Mother Theodore was often entertained by the family of Thomas Benbridge, whose daughters were at school at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and at Logansport by the French Canadian merchant, Colonel John B. Duret. After his daughter Mary Anne's baptism in August, 1846, at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, the Duret family, which had drifted away amid the religious privations of frontier life, gradually returned to the Church. Mary Anne lived only a few years longer, but her two younger sisters, Elizabeth and Maria followed her as pupils at Saint Mary's. Ida, Sister Irma, born in 1848, was only a child at the time of the Foundress's last trips to Fort Wayne. In old age, she used to relate that Mother sometimes took the stage to Logansport, and after dining with the Duret family, was driven by their father to the canal packet for Fort Wayne.

The Community had other friends and acquaintances in Logansport. Mr. Cyrus Vigus, who owned the extensive Vigus stage routes on which the handsome coaches cost six hundred dollars each and were the pride of settlers along the way, was always interested to hear news of his daughter Lizzie at Saint Mary's when Mother Theodore was there. The town was the old mission of Father Martin from 1839 to 1841 and the home of his protégés the two Doyle brothers, at that time still in the Vincennes seminary, and their sisters in the Community, Sister Philomene and Sister Lucy. Mother Theodore also met at Logansport during her journeys of these years the family of the pioneer Indiana settler, the first white child born at Fort Wayne, General Hyacinthe Lasselle, whose four daughters, Caroline, Julia, Louise, and Melanie Lasselle,¹¹ were pupils at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. General Lasselle, who was one of the members of the Terre Haute Land Company which bought and plotted the town in 1816, had died in 1843. Born in Fort Wayne in 1777, while it was still the

¹⁰ Sister Mary John.

¹¹De Wald-Lasselle family tree in the possession of Señora J. H. Williams of Mexico City, Sister Alma Beuret's sister.

Miami town of Kekionga, he had lived as an Indian trader and innkeeper at Vincennes and pursued those avocations in Logansport till his death. His portrait by Lewis Peckham, said to be the first similar work of known authorship in Indiana, looks down at present from the walls of the Indiana State Historical Library in Indianapolis. Like all Mother Theodore's contacts with souls these visits were of immense benefit to the households where she was entertained. Children and grown-ups clustered round her drawn by the all-embracing kindness which is the surest mark of the presence and reign of Christ in the soul. "Faith and love speak," it has been said, "and the whole earth recognizes them."

The slow canal boat ride to Fort Wayne along the edge of the northern Indiana lake and marsh region, which was in summer and early autumn a lovely forest panorama of luxuriant vegetation, permitted detailed observation of the scenery and of the traces of the fallen kings of the forest whose homes were here all along the historic river. No evidence of the advancing march of American civilization, which at the time involved the sorrowful exile of the Miamis from their ancient hunting grounds, was missed by the Sisters in 1846. Only eight years earlier the Potawatami had been driven from their ancestral haunts over a "trail of death" with their young Breton priest, Benjamin Petit, who died on his return journey among the Jesuits in Saint Louis. That very year, 1846, when the Sisters of Providence first crossed northern Indiana, the last remnant of the once powerful Miami tribe were being assembled to follow the Potawatami across the Mississippi.

All along the Wabash here in late spring bloomed the apple trees planted by that eccentric altruist Johnny Appleseed, who died in Fort Wayne in 1843, and every town had some special claim to interest. Peru was linked with the story of Frances Slocum, the White Rose of the Miamis, who had been stolen by Delaware Indians in Pennsylvania in 1773 and was at that time still living among the remaining Miamis on the Mississinewa River, a tributary of the Wabash. Lagro and Wabash were memorable for the great battle between the Corkonians and the Far Downs at work on the canal on the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne in July, 1835, which had been averted only by the timely arrival of state militia. At the "Fourche du Vabage" or Forks of the Wabash, the confluence of the Wabash and the Little Wabash Rivers, was the old Indian treaty ground four miles west of Huntington, a two-acre cleared tract in the forest where the last Miami treaty was signed in 1840 obligating the Indians to relinquish their lands and remove to the West. Father Benoit, who took great interest in them, was here every year when their annuities were paid by the government till 1845, and on one occasion is said to have compelled one of the Fort Wayne traders to refund seventy-five thousand dollars of which he had defrauded the Indians.¹²

The colony of Sisters was received by the people of Fort Wayne with enthusiasm. Tradition relates that they made the last stage of their journey in a covered wagon. When from the canal boat they saw the cross-tipped spire of the little frame church of Saint Augustine, the sign of Catholicity which Mother Theodore had sought so often in vain in

¹² *Biographical Sketch of the Rt. Rev. Julian Benoit*, (J. J. Jocquel, Fort Wayne, 1885), p. 9.

Protestant America, and when they heard the evening Angelus from Father Benoit's old Spanish bell echoing across the little frontier town, at once they felt at home. In 1846 from its location in the center of old Fort Wayne on the edge of the original town plotted in 1822, Saint Augustine's looked out over a straggling canal town and trading post. Only a few blocks away rose the old fort still standing in part, which had replaced Wayne's stockade of 1794 near the famous portage. A rail fence ran along the new Piqua Road, now Calhoun Street, in front of the convent, and beyond stretched the deep woods dotted with a few scattered cabins of white settlers. Up the Piqua Road the covered wagon lumbered to the Sisters' new combination convent and school, past the ensemble of log cabins, larger frame dwellings, and an occasional recently built brick house. Conscientious of the curious and respectful glances of French Canadians, Americans, and immigrants, they drew up before the solidly constructed house on the corner of Jefferson and Calhoun Streets, which has now been their home for over a hundred years.

The original building of two stories and basement erected by Father Benoit for the Sisters in 1846, still intact today as the central portion of the present Saint Augustine's, is completely surrounded however by the two spacious later additions. The first of these wings on Jefferson Street was built by Mother Cecilia in 1867 at a cost of over eighteen thousand dollars, and the second in 1885 by Mother Euphrasie, Father Benoit contributing five thousand dollars to the entire cost of over twenty thousand. She was his beloved godchild, converted by him from Methodism at Saint Augustine's, where she was a pupil in 1863, and now as superior general of the Sisters of Providence she had a powerful claim on his generosity. The front entrance of the old house has been greatly altered since Mother Theodore's day. Reached at that time by one of the graceful narrow single or double curving stone stairways with the wrought iron railing of the period, it is now approached by a wide flight of stone steps which mask the original double basement door.

The handsome hand-carved mantles and slender stairway with walnut hand rail and most of the interior of four rooms on each of the two upper floors remain almost unchanged. In the basement, too, the deep masonry of the large bake oven remains and also the fireplace with its hooks and spit. The furniture mentioned above was all in place when the Sisters arrived. Every room was ready for occupancy, the parlor and stairs carpeted, curtains at the windows, and the full complement of iron cooking utensils in the kitchen and queensware, as it was called, in the dining room. Outside on the meadow a cow and her calf were contentedly grazing.

Opening early in September the school enrolled sixty pupils immediately, and gradually some hundred and fifty availed themselves of its advantages. The faculty was entirely American, all three earnest, capable, and devout young religious, filled with zeal to teach the knowledge and love of Our Lord Jesus Christ to the little ones of Fort Wayne. They were also experienced and carefully selected by Mother Theodore to fill the needs of Father Benoit's growing Catholic population. Sister Mary Magdalen after three years at Vincennes was now to be superior. Sister Catherine was to teach the smaller children, and Sister Caroline was the

sine qua non of every school of the Sisters of Providence in America, a music teacher.

Their pupils were drawn from several diverse groups. Fort Wayne although incorporated as a city in 1839, and from its location at the "great gateway," destined evidently to grow, was in 1846 hardly larger than Terre Haute, which Bishop Bruté had in 1835 pointed out as the largest town on the Wabash. At the time of the census of 1850 the population of both towns had just passed the four thousand mark. In a manuscript estimate of the Catholic population made before he left the diocese in 1847¹³ Bishop de la Hailandière lists Fort Wayne and Huntington together as numbering one hundred and eighty families, one of a series of similar numbers which he consistently multiplied by six to obtain an average of 1,350 persons. Bishop Bruté's estimate of one hundred and fifty Catholic families in Fort Wayne in 1835 included a number of Irish families who had come during the 1830's and probably also some of the Irish laborers, a necessarily transient group who moved on as section by section of the canal was completed. The Colericks, Hedekins, and O'Connors were of the former Irish group.

A second permanent contingent of the Fort Wayne Catholic population comprised the original French Canadians, who had for years been engaged in the fur trade and commerce with the Indians, the Comparets, Lasselles,¹⁴ and Béquettes, the Avelines or Saint Jules, the Peltiers and Bouries. A third group¹⁵ was made up of a growing quota of Catholic families many from Alsace Lorraine and the Rhineland, the Bakers,¹⁶ the Nolls,¹⁷ the Trentmans and Niermans,¹⁸ the Wolkes and Myers,¹⁹ De Walds¹⁴ and Graffes,²⁰ many of whom settled upon the desirable farmlands of the New Purchase. This group constantly augmented by immigration soon outnumbered the other nationalities. The observant Americans quickly noted that these fine, sober, industrious Catholic German settlers were also kind, openhearted, and generous. The earliest American colonists mostly from Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, and other eastern states, had increased very slowly and had numbered in 1830 only one thousand persons in the entire extent of Allen County when some Indiana counties had ten times that number and few had less.²¹ Many of the children of these Protestant Americans were pupils from the first at Saint Augustine's.

After ten years of opposition and debate, actual work on the canal had begun in 1832, but so long and arduous was the undertaking that only in 1843, eleven years later, were boats plying at last between Lafayette and Toledo on Lake Erie. During the 1830 decade settlers from

¹³ N.D.U.A.

¹⁴ Sister Alma's family.

¹⁵ Griswold, *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne*, pp. 345, 347, 357.

¹⁶ The family of Sister Euphrasie, Sister Carmel, and Sister Anne Berchmans.

¹⁷ Ancestors of Most Rev. J. F. Noll and Sister Rose Beatrice.

¹⁸ Families of Sister Aloysius Mary Trentman, Mae Trentman, '89, and Helen Trentman Brueggeman, '03.

¹⁹ Ancestors of Sister Mary Helen Fleming, the Williens, Helen Brueggeman, Helen Dinnen, and Josephine Dinnen.

²⁰ The family of Sister Mary Celestia, Sister Mary Stanislaus, and Sister Clare Marie.

²¹ Esarey, *History of Indiana*, vol. I, p. 315.

the East had been coming up the Maumee River to locate in and near Fort Wayne. Overland transportation for European immigrants across northern New York from Albany to Buffalo by the Erie Canal had been available since 1825, but when the canal from Toledo to Fort Wayne was open, completing the route from New York City, it proved a factor which contributed enormously to the development of all of northern Indiana.

Children of all the diverse groups of the Fort Wayne population made up the sixty pupils who assembled in the Sisters' school early in September of 1846. Dark haired South German Catholics, American Protestants, and Canadian French bearing the names of the early French fur traders licensed by Governor Harrison in 1801, predominated. No registration lists have crossed the years, and only a few names have come down from those first days at Saint Augustine's: little Helen Myers,²² who entered on the first day what was known as the "primer class" and continued through the school, Bridget Rice,²³ Mary Lyons,²⁴ who made her first Holy Communion in 1846 at twelve years, and little Elizabeth Glutting, nine years old, who received from Mother Theodore a small card still preserved with a garland of flowers painted by Sister Saint Francis Xavier as a "Reward for Good Behavior." The register, however, with its careful entries of receipts and expenditures, still unfaded in Sister Mary Magdalen's small clear hand, contains names of many Fort Wayne families of the 1840's.²⁵

Another group, however, mingled with the white children, scions of the Miami families whose ancestors had ranged the forest and kindled the council fires at Kekionga for over a hundred years. The final treaties consummated by the forced transportation beyond the Missouri River in Kansas in the summer of 1846 removed the remnants of the once powerful Miami Confederation from Indiana forever. August 1, 1844, was the original date set for the transportation, but only in 1846²⁶ could they be finally rounded up, clasp- ing, it is said, handfuls of earth to their hearts torn by the rankling memory of many griefs. In the interest of order and peace Father Benoit accompanied them, Bishop de la Hailandière permitting Father Louis Neyron to replace him in Fort Wayne during his absence.

The Miamis in general had resisted the efforts of the Jesuits to Christianize them, though at first considered the most promising and attractive of the tribes and the most eager to hear the missionaries. In view of their outstanding success with the Canada and Maine Indians, and even with the Illinois tribes and the Potawatami, the missionaries found the Wabash Indians in general poor material to work upon. After the time

²² Mrs. William Fleming, Sister Mary Helen's mother.

²³ Mrs. James Cox, Sister Louise Clare's grandmother.

²⁴ Mrs. Beuret, Sister Alma's grandmother.

²⁵ Names which appear in the early records are Lasselle, Simmons, Spears, Nierman, Brown, Ingle, Hedges, Jane Bohan, Trentman, Elizabeth Baker, Bert, Lenen, Hayes, Low, Juval, Bartlett, Frank, Nelson, Witz, Summers, Sheran, Mayer, Corcoran, Fisher, Glutting, Tiger, Dr. Tolerton, Marguerite Carroll, Félice Béquette, Brooks, Black, Ellen Donovan, Colerick, Adeline Robert, Mahler, Ophelia Dubois, Collar, Adeline Lecroy, Ursula Wolke, Josephine Willman, C. McCain, Amanda Columbia, C. Muhler, Fink, Grover, Will, Harriet Herrick, Elizabeth Buchanan, Emily Mark, Ferry, Lutz, Anna Newport, Susan Muldoon, Waters, M. Swinney, Anderson, Mason, Allen, Faller, Costello, Forsyte, Comparet, Lavina and Kate Ewing, Lizzy Graffe, Joquel.

²⁶ Griswold, *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne*, p. 378.

of Allouez, who died in 1689, when the Miamis were still in western Indiana, the Jesuits have little to say of them, and very few were Christianized. In 1817 Major Benjamin F. Stickney, Indian agent at Fort Wayne, reported of the Miamis, "They have had no schools or missionaries among them since the time of the French Jesuits."²⁷ The Kentucky Baptist missionary, Isaac McCoy, who had tried unsuccessfully to establish himself north of Saint Mary-of-the Woods, was not more fortunate in Fort Wayne in 1820 and moved on to found the Carey mission at Niles, Michigan.

Exempted from the treaties and permitted by the government to remain on large individual reservations, their old homes on the Wabash, were the civil chiefs of the Miami tribe, John B. Richardville, Francis Lafontaine, Francis Godefroi, and a few others. Richardville, the richest Indian in North America, had fought as a youth under Little Turtle in the last desperate struggle of Fallen Timbers against Wayne. His sister Ta-cum-wah, an exceptional woman who is said to have managed the tribe for thirty years, was the mother of John B. Richardville, who although the son of a Frenchman, Joseph Drouet de Richardville²⁸ a French Canadian trader from Vincennes, as a young man became chief of the Miami tribe, and by exceptional business acumen and great thrift amassed a large fortune during his long life as a trader. So great was his prestige and ability that a competent observer²⁹ said of him that had he been born and educated in France he might have equalled Talleyrand.

Father Benoit's interest in the Indians, without excluding their material concerns, was devoted primarily to their spiritual needs, and he converted some of the chiefs and their families. In the church records he mentioned the baptism of "Francis La Fontaine, maximo duci Miamiensis,"³⁰ on May 3, 1843, age about thirty-three years, also his marriage to Catherine, daughter of John B. Richardville, probably subsequent to an earlier tribal ceremony, and the baptism of five of their children "in this place called Fork of the Wabash or la Fourche du Vabage."³¹ Richardville died in 1841 at the age of eighty-one and was buried near the Fort Wayne Cathedral wall. To the last his wealth remained his chief preoccupation, and Father Benoit had noted with disappointment that when he celebrated Mass in the Richardville home, all the family received the sacraments except the old chief. He was attended in his last hours by the Reverend Michael Clarke of Lafayette, but Father Benoit was appointed executor of his estate, much of it in tarnished coins which had been buried in the ground for safekeeping.

The La Fontaine and Richardville children were among the earliest resident pupils at Saint Augustine's, as the former lived in their father's comfortable home, a frame house still standing a mile west of Huntington at the Forks, a location to which Richardville, or Rusherville, as the name was sometimes written, also had removed from his earlier home on the

²⁷ W. A. Brice, *History of Fort Wayne* (D. W. Jones and Son, Fort Wayne, 1868), p. 291.

²⁸ Griswold, *Pictorial History*, p. 48.

²⁹ General John Tipton.

³⁰ Greatest chief of the Miamis.

³¹ Fort Wayne Cathedral Records.

Saint Mary's River near Fort Wayne. Richardville was succeeded after fifty years as civil chief of the tribe by Francis La Fontaine who was induced to accompany the tribe on the long journey to Kansas. He died the next year at Lafayette on his way home, supposedly from poison, and is buried in Huntington. Catherine Richardville, the chief's daughter, was the first of the family to enter at Saint Augustine's, followed by her sisters, Mary and Sara. In 1848, after their father's death came the La Fontaine children, Esther, Francis, Roseanne, Joseph, and Archange³² the youngest, and Louisa Richardville, and in 1850 the name of Godefroi appears on the records. All the daughters of James R. Godfrey, who eventually also became chief, were educated at Saint Augustine's.³³ Several of the Indian children remained for long periods of years, and two of them, Mary Richardville and Esther La Fontaine, were afterwards pupils at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The Sisters at Fort Wayne took these dusky daughters of the forest to their hearts. None were full-blooded Miamis, and some of the Richardvilles showed the light blue eyes and mingled red and white complexion of the old chief. They led as a rule the free life of the woods on the reservations in the summer but returned each autumn to the quiet of school life at Saint Augustine's. Unlike Christmas Dagenet and his family, who had a comfortable house in the front of their place and lived in a wigwam in the rear, the Fort Wayne Miamis lived in the American houses on their large reservations, which originally included parts of seven counties³⁴ granted to the Richardville, La Fontaine, Godfrey, and several other families by Presidents Tyler and Van Buren. Some children always remained at school all during the year, and from the first, two Sisters always spent the summer at Fort Wayne to care for them. The Indian girls were often ill. "You would not have so much sickness," wrote Father Benoit, "were it not for these wild birds of the forest." They inherited the weakened physique of the tribe in its decadence. Once during a small pox scare Father Benoit had pupils and teachers all vaccinated, a practice much less common then than now. The La Fontaine and Richardville children were short-lived and Archange La Fontaine, Mrs. Englemann, alone lived to old age retaining to the end of her life the refined and gracious manners she had learned during her ten years at Saint Augustine's.

Through these Miami pupils in the 1840's and 1850's, the Fort Wayne Sisters came into contact with their guardian, Mr. John Roche of Huntington, for many years one of the most generous and devoted friends of the Community. His youngest sister, Bridget, was a pupil at Saint Augustine's in 1848, and years later in 1864 when his niece Catherine Smith entered the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and became Sister Mary Liguori, he was known as "Uncle John" to a generation of Sisters and friends, many of whom never knew his full name.

John Roche was one of a large family who came to America from County Wexford, Ireland, in 1830, and to Huntington in the early days of

³² Later Mrs. Englemann.

³³ Griswold, *Pictorial History*, p. 591.

³⁴ Statement of Mrs. Leming of Huntington, great granddaughter of Francis La Fontaine, by courtesy of Sister M. Evodine, O.S.F.

the canal. His career proves that opportunity was peering round the corner in the new Western country even for the poor Irish canal diggers. These were not the days of the giant steam shovels which dug the great waterway at Panama, and the canal, advancing from 1832 by the slow hand labor of pick and shovel, took eleven years to cross the state from Fort Wayne. Thus the Irish laborers had ample opportunity to become acquainted with people and conditions. John Roche rose speedily from one position to another on the canal, then left it in 1844 to enter the Indian trading post at Huntington, where first an employee, he later became the partner of Francis La Fontaine. Here was La Fontaine's house where the Indians came to throw upon the floor the tarnished gold pieces from their last payment in exchange for bright new ones from Washington. On the chief's death, Mr. Roche succeeded him in charge of the post. He learned enough Miami to transact business and acquired extensive real estate holdings. Eventually as president of the First Huntington Bank and one of the organizers of the Wabash Railroad, he became one of the most prosperous and influential residents of the town. His generosity and devotedness to the Sisters of Providence may be gauged by the rumor which circulated more than once during these years among those who knew him, "The Sisters need money. Mr. Roche will have to sell another piece of land." Ready money continued to be scarce especially at times.

As their guardian, Mr. Roche was responsible for placing the Indian children in Catholic schools, the boys with the Brothers at Lafayette, the girls at Saint Augustine's and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and his regular and substantial payments were an important item in the Fort Wayne Sisters' budget.³⁵ The piety and the docility of the Indian children were a great source of consolation to Father Benoit. When one of them, little Roseanne La Fontaine, died at Saint Augustine's in 1847, he wrote to Mother Theodore that the Sisters had sent a little angel on before them to the heaven she owed to their zeal.

The success of Saint Augustine's, which was evident from the first weeks, continued to be due in large measure to the interest and cooperation of Father Benoit. In 1846 when the Sisters arrived in Fort Wayne, he had been ten years in America and was thoroughly conversant with the American character and customs. He was not one of the Breton group of French priests in Indiana, but like the two Bishops, Bazin and Saint-Palais, was a native of the south of France, born at Septimoncel, a mountain village in the Jura in the old province of Franche Comté on the Swiss border near the Lake of Geneva. He had finished his preparatory studies for the priesthood early and was teaching while awaiting the required age for ordination when he met Bishop Bruté at Lyons in 1836 and offered himself for the Indiana mission. After a year spent at Emmitsburg, Maryland, to learn English, he was ordained there by Bishop Bruté and sent to southern Indiana. Only in 1840 did he begin his ministry in Fort Wayne, where the small frame church already dedicated to Saint Augustine was standing on the same historic square where the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception now rears its twin towers.

³⁵ At his death he left for the use of the Sisters of Providence in Huntington, the roomy brick house he had built for himself and his sister, "Aunt Bridget," and the city is indebted to Miss Roche's generosity for its handsome Saint Mary's Church.

Generous, learned, energetic, and devoted to his sacred calling, Father Benoit turned every energy of his capable mind to the care and development of his charge, and his zeal carried him on horseback all over northern Indiana wherever a Catholic family could be found. Disappointed in his appeals for aid to Bishop de la Hailandière and thrown upon his own resources, he developed the financial and business acumen which eventually enabled him to leave so substantial a legacy to the Catholic people of Fort Wayne in the edifices of Cathedral Square and to distribute also large sums in charity before his death. "By any standard of appraisal, he is one of the most impressive figures that has appeared in the history of the diocese of Fort Wayne."³⁶ He was ever a generous and devoted friend of the Sisters of Providence. Once at a later period of financial stress when one of the superiors approached him to borrow money he sternly replied, "No, I will not lend money to the Sisters of Providence. I will *give* money to them." His numerous letters to Mother Theodore and to later superiors and others preserved in the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods archives range over his long career at Fort Wayne and reveal admirably his fine qualities of heart and mind. Liberally sprinkled with quotations from the French and Latin classics and with shrewd observations on men and affairs, the earlier letters especially show his veneration for Mother Theodore and his entire confidence in her arrangements for his school.

Father Benoit was not the first pastor of Fort Wayne. The Catholics there had been ministered to by that indefatigable missionary, the Reverend Stephen Theodore Badin during yearly visits from 1830 to 1835, when he said Mass in the residences of Francis Comparet and John B. Béquette.³⁷ In 1835 Father Lalumiere included Fort Wayne in his exploratory tour of the eastern half of the diocese while Bishop Bruté was traveling through the western section. In 1836 the Reverend Louis Muller had been named resident pastor and in 1837 he built the first little frame church. Father Benoit returned to France for some months in 1841, and on his return he brought a fine Spanish bell which was used on the old Saint Augustine's church till it burned in 1859. "I brought back a seven-hundred-pound bell with a very pretty tone, a Spanish one, cast in 1787, and paid two hundred dollars of my own money for it," he wrote to Very Reverend Augustin Martin in 1843.³⁸ It was recast after the fire in two smaller bells, of which one was given to the Brothers' school and is now enshrined in the Catholic Central High School Library; the other, long used at Saint Augustine's Academy, still hangs in 1949, in its old position in the convent court.

Part and parcel of the pastor's preoccupations for the education of the children were his early plans for the boys. The two Comparets, Francis Godefroi, and several others were sent to Saint Gabriel's College in Vincennes, and in 1847 a boys' school taught by Brothers was opened in Fort Wayne. From the first Father Benoit was delighted with the success of the Sisters' school. His letters to his brother priests and especially to Mother Theodore abound with expressions of his satisfaction. "Our Sis-

³⁶ Msgr. Thomas M. Conroy, *Notes on the History of the Cathedral*, (Fort Wayne, 1945), p. 18.

³⁷ Sister Mary Assumptiade's grandfather.

³⁸ 19 juillet, 1843. S.M.W.A.

ters have ninety pupils," he wrote in February, 1847, "and are very much loved. I am now working to prepare a dwelling for some Brothers."³⁹ In the following August in view of the development in the school, Mother Theodore sent an additional Sister to Fort Wayne, Sister Mary Therese Delahaye. In October the pastor wrote again to Father Martin, "Our schools are succeeding marvelously. Fort Wayne now possesses four Sisters and two Brothers, and the Sisters' school is pronounced by the press of the vicinity the best in the state."⁴⁰

The beautiful and pious ceremony of the children's First Communion gave him great consolation. To the devotedness and influence of the Sisters the pastor attributed a gradual change in the atmosphere of his parish. "Thanks to your daughters," he wrote to Mother Theodore in April, 1847, "we have had a truly impressive Holy Week. They manifested a zeal without ostentation or affectation . . . and the entire congregation has looked on in amazement. But would they not otherwise have been too unworthy of their Mother?"⁴¹ "I have nothing to say," he wrote a little later, "of your excellent daughters of Fort Wayne. Their zeal makes me blush, and it is surpassed only by their charity and piety. May God continue to bless them, for they are a source of benediction to my congregation."⁴² "O most dear Mother, so truly a mother to me, pray earnestly that I may imitate the models you have sent me whose goodness reduces me to confusion each time that I behold them."⁴³

Owing to the year-long illness in the school especially among the Indian children, to Sister Mary Magdalen's very poor health, and to the continued increase in the enrollment, the pastor was now asking for two additional Sisters for the coming year. Accordingly in August, 1848, Sister Gabriella and Sister Philomene were added to the faculty. The original combined convent and school was now overcrowded, as the Sisters had established as soon as possible the system brought from France of *école payante* and *école gratuite*, academy and poor school, or free school, as it was called in America. Father Benoit was therefore now planning to erect a separate additional school building. Situated on Jefferson Street east of the convent, the one-story brick school of three rooms was not ready for occupancy, however, till late in 1849. Sister Catherine had taught the German children from the first at Saint Augustine's, but now a movement was on foot to establish a separate German parish under a young Alsatian priest, the Reverend Edward M. Faller, Father Benoit's curate since 1846, whose family belonged to the Picquet colony and who had come to America via New Orleans in 1840.⁴⁴ Father Benoit had built a German boys' school in 1848, and a German school society had been established. Although the two parishes were definitively separated in 1849, not till 1853 were the German children transferred to their own school in the same building as Saint Mary's Church on Lafayette Street,⁴⁵ where Sister

³⁹ A. M. A. Martin, Baton Rouge, La., 3 février, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 octobre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁴¹ 5 avril, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁴² 5 octobre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁴³ 9 décembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁴ Benoit à Mother Theodore, 22 juin, 1849. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁵ Blanchard, *History of the Catholic Church in Indiana*, vol. 1, p. 502.

Catherine and Sister Edward continued to be employed to the end of Mother Theodore's life.

Mother Theodore, accompanied by Sister Angelina, had visited Fort Wayne in May, 1849. Her visits were always gala days for the Sisters. Her all-pervading kindness and motherly solicitude, and her gentle gaiety when she presided at table and at recreation were a perennial source of joy. At that time, however, there seems to have been no anticipation of the cholera epidemic which broke out early in the following summer all along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Cases gradually appeared throughout Indiana and late in July Father Benoit wrote to Mother Theodore:

We are no longer in suspense. The cholera has reached Fort Wayne, and I will officiate in a few hours at the funeral of its first victim. All your daughters regret not being able to return to the motherhouse, but all are determined not to abandon their post in the moment of danger. This devotedness, this sacrifice is noble and generous. I rejoice at it, *ma Mère*, and it will be registered, I hope, in the book of life, first for these excellent children, then for their alma mater and my poor congregation. Like another Moses, lift your hands toward heaven, very dear Mother, while we are struggling, and if we are called to consummate our sacrifice, say *Deo gratias* with all your heart, for a beautiful crown is prepared for the martyr of charity.⁴⁶

Father Benoit, as soon as the first case appeared, had at once offered the school building as a temporary hospital and the services of the Sisters of Providence as nurses. They "became immediately of great service"⁴⁷ and cared for the sick all during the summer. Friday, August 2, was appointed as a day of general humiliation, fasting, and prayer for the cessation of the epidemic, but only in late September could Mother Theodore note in the Community diary that the scourge had at last died out.

An increase in faculty members necessitated by the growth of the school took place almost yearly for some time. Sister Marie Joseph had been named superior at the retreat in 1849 to replace Sister Mary Magdalen, whose devotedness and piety had greatly endeared her to the people of Fort Wayne. "She is so loved here," wrote Father Benoit, "that another Sister would have trouble in taking her place."⁴⁸ Sister Gabriella, Sister Mary Celestia, Sister Lawrence, Sister Martina, and Sister Clotilde now (1849) made up the faculty of Saint Augustine's in addition to Sister Marie Joseph, the superior. The pastor was greatly edified by the zeal of the new arrivals in caring for the cholera patients. Of Sister Marie Joseph he wrote to Mother Theodore:

I loved to see this good Sister among the sick. She seemed a mother with her children, and I am persuaded that not a shadow of fear penetrated her mind. In her noble footsteps Sister Celestia walked with a gay heart and seemed to breathe at ease only when she was among the sufferers. . . . As for Sister Lawrence, she has no fear of fire itself. She is a soldier *sans peur et sans reproche*.⁴⁹

To the great pleasure of the Sisters the new school was ready for use in December, 1849, and many of the classes were transferred to it, leaving the little convent to the use of the Sisters and resident pupils. Father

⁴⁶ Benoit à Mother Theodore, 23 juillet, 1849. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁷ Griswold, *Pictorial History*, p. 400.

⁴⁸ A Mother Theodore, 31 août, 1848. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ 21 septembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

Benoit considered the new school rooms "warm, spacious, well lighted, even elegant. Sister Celeste is enchanted," he wrote to Mother Theodore.⁵⁰ This year, 1850, there was no question of all the Sisters remaining in Fort Wayne for the summer, and all but the necessary two left en route for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at eleven at night on August 1 on the *Wabash*, the *Clyde* or one of the other roomy and comfortable canal packets. Next day they passed through Logansport, and on the third in the morning reached Lafayette and slept that night at Covington, ready early on August 4 for the long stage ride to Terre Haute. The canal had not yet reached the city of Terre Haute. A very highly prized gift to the Community this year from the pastor of Fort Wayne was fifty pairs of *sabots* which the French Sisters still preferred to the American rubbers which were rare and hard to get.

Sister Marie Joseph's health, never robust and very fragile after her long illness at Vincennes in 1847, gave great cause for anxiety early in the school year of 1850-1851. She had been in bed for over a month when Father Benoit wrote to Mother Theodore on October 2, 1850, but he did not find the obstinate malaria from which she was suffering nor her extreme languor and weakness reasons for great uneasiness and expected an improvement with the approach of cold weather. When he wrote later in January she was still very sick, with discouraging relapses after a few days improvement, but ten days later he was convinced that her death was approaching.

The enemy is there awaiting his victim; his work of destruction is slow, hardly perceptible but ceaseless, and he will soon have wrested her last breath from this excellent daughter of Providence. I have done everything to deceive myself. I hoped against all hope. I hope now no longer. Come, Mother, as soon as possible, as soon as the canal is open for navigation. How much this dear daughter desires to see her Mother once more!⁵¹

Tuberculosis had now definitely declared itself, and though long deceived with the false hopes of the consumptive, this excellent religious died in the early morning hours of March 17 without seeing that dear Mother she had longed for so greatly. She had made courageously the sacrifice of dying far from Saint Mary's as the severe weather made the long journey to Fort Wayne an impossibility in the Foundress's now shattered health. Conscious to the last, the dying religious summoned the Sisters and the boarding pupils to her bedside and spoke to them feelingly of the nothingness of earthly joys and the recompense of virtue. Of the young girls who knelt around her bed, two entered the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods that same year.⁵²

She is no more, wrote Father Benoit. It will not be given to us to see her ever again on this earth. Oh, with what confidence she gave me a rendezvous in heaven! God is so good. He will grant me not to miss it. You suffer from her loss, very dear Mother. To understand your sorrow I need only consult my own heart. What did I not endure for six months every day to see so devoted, so beloved a person languish so long, suffer, and die. It is a spectacle too distressing for poor human nature, which could not bear it if religion with its promises, so brilliant

⁵⁰ 14 décembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

⁵¹ 31 janvier, 1851. S.M.W.A.

⁵² Elizabeth and Mary Buchanan of Huntington.

and so sure, did not lift the veil and allow us to glimpse the immense glory which eclipses all the sorrows of life. We may well weep, Mother. Our loss is very great, great for your Community, great for the house of Fort Wayne. We are happy nevertheless not to grieve as those who have no hope. Oh, what hope she had! It could never be confounded. At the sight of so beautiful a death it remains for us to exclaim with Balaam, "May my soul die the death of the just and my last end be like unto hers."⁵³

A capable and experienced local superior, "our best," as Mother Theodore avowed, the loss of Sister Marie Joseph was deeply felt. Her patience and cheerfulness during her long illness, her uprightness, and her affectionate heart had endeared her to her Sisters. She was truly a charming person, as Father Benoit had remarked upon first meeting her. In the circular announcing her death to the Community Mother Theodore recalled her obedience, her devotedness to her Congregation, her love for the Rule, and her tender piety. "Her beautiful soul was visible on her open and benevolent countenance. . . . You have been consoled and edified especially by her universal charity. . . . Those who have lived with her must remember how she labored to render life sweet and happy to her companions."⁵⁴ Twelve years of missionary life were given to her; and despite poor health and many hardships, she was able to accomplish much good. Life wore out quickly in the pioneer years of the Indiana mission. At fifty-four Sister Marie Joseph was considered, as Sister Saint Francis Xavier said, "aged and delicate. . . . She had, however, a heart of gold, or rather of wax, which melted at the least ray of celestial heat. . . . She died so holily, so joyfully, that it would tempt the angels to wish to die." To these words of heartfelt regret she added what for her was the *ne plus ultra* of praise, "Sister Marie Joseph was much like Mother Theodore."⁵⁵

She long slept her last sleep in the old Catholic cemetery of Fort Wayne, where, however, before three years had hardly passed another devoted daughter of Mother Theodore was laid by her side, one who reached out quietly and grasped the diadem of martyr of charity coveted so eagerly by all the Fort Wayne Sisters in 1849. In 1848 when Mother Theodore appointed for Saint Augustine's the six Sisters Father Benoit had so ardently desired, she sent to act as cook and housekeeper, charged also with the care of the sick children, that very Julienne Cheminant, now Sister Lawrence, who had helped to nurse the Foundress herself so untiringly during her long illness at the Ursuline Convent in New Orleans on her return from France in 1844. Mother Theodore describes her as "quite a small person but very active and zealous," and Father Benoit could not find words worthy of her self-sacrificing zeal. Occupied all day in the care of the house, the laundry, the two cows, and the cooking, she often spent part of the night serving the sick children, but no word of complaint escaped her lips though her work grew heavier from year to year as the school continued to increase.

Fort Wayne suffered three cholera epidemics in all. Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer had replaced Sister Marie Joseph as superior in May, 1851, and in 1852 she and Sister Lawrence were named to remain when the

⁵³ 31 mars, 1851. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁴ *J. and L.*, p. 312.

⁵⁵ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 251.

other Sisters left for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. During the summer the cholera appeared anew in the canal and river towns, and three members of a German immigrant family on a canal boat from Toledo perished in a few days followed by their little niece, one of Sister Felicité's pupils at Saint Augustine's. A few days later a French family newly-arrived from Europe was wiped out with the same terrible swiftness. In 1854 the scourge reappeared all along the canal and was especially severe at Lafayette. At Fort Wayne Father Benoit called as usual upon Sister Lawrence's skill and courage, and with her customary self-sacrifice she devoted herself to the sufferers in the temporary hospital in the school building.

Her own hour, however, had come. Mother Theodore was shocked and grieved to receive on August 20, 1854, a telegram from Father Benoit announcing her illness, which was evidently hopeless from the very first. In fact, she was then already dead, having passed away on the nineteenth after only eight hours illness. Father Benoit sent the details of this second beautiful death to Mother Theodore recalling to her also the motives she had for consolation and rejoicing: "A victim of zeal and charity, Sister Lawrence's death was a real martyrdom. And her life! Have you ever seen a person more truly upright, more sincerely pious, more exact in fulfilling her duties? Her last moments were like the evening of a beautiful day." Death and hell had no terrors for this good religious. No regrets for the past clouded her last hours. "I am happy to die a Sister of Providence. The Community will pray for me. Tell this expressly to Mother, I have nothing to regret in this life—nothing—nothing." She seemed to fear a long purgatory, but generous Father Benoit reassured her by pointing out the merit of the death to which she had willingly and joyfully exposed herself and by promising to say fifty Masses for her in view of her years of labor and prayer for Saint Augustine's. "Thank you, Father," she murmured, "a thousand times, good Father, good to the end."⁵⁶ A short time afterwards, while he was reciting the prayers of the dying near her bedside, she quietly expired.

This second death so far from home was a deep grief to the Foundress. As almost all the Sisters were still at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, no circular remains to commemorate the virtues of this excellent Sister. To the companion who had spent the summer with her at Fort Wayne and was near her at death, Mother Theodore wrote:

Our sorrow at the sudden departure of dear Sister Lawrence is deep indeed, but it is a sweet thought to have the confidence that our beloved Sister is now wearing the martyr's crown and bearing the palm of victory. . . . I have invoked our martyr today. She will aid us more now that she is in the court of the King than she could ever have done on earth.⁵⁷

The school continued to develop in enrollment and in prestige. Saint Augustine's is not only the oldest Sisters' school in northern Indiana, the area afterwards cut off from Vincennes as the diocese of Fort Wayne, but was for all these years the only institution offering to children of the grammar grades the cultural advantages of music and painting. In 1852

⁵⁶ *Life of Mother Theodore*, p. 412.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

Sister Mary Celestia had fourteen music pupils, and Father Benoit considered the *distribution des prix* superior to any previous year. There were now twenty-three resident pupils and seven Sisters at Saint Augustine's, and two at Saint Mary's, the German school. Sister Saint Vincent, Sister Mary Celestia, and Sister Gabriella remained during all these years. At different times Father Benoit asked them to become sponsors for his Indian converts. On October 21, 1848, he recorded the baptism of "James, son of James Godfrey and Mongozaqua Richardville, aged about forty years, godmother, Sister Mary Magdalen of the Congregation of Providence" and a few weeks later on November 12, 1848, he baptized "Maria Archangela, wife of Gregory Bondy, aged thirty-three years, of the tribe commonly called Miamis, godmother Sister Gabriella, one of the Sisters of the Congregation of Providence." Later in 1855, on February 15, Sister Saint Vincent, "superior of the Sisters of Providence in Fort Wayne," was godmother to a child of one of the pioneer families, Julia Mary, daughter of Henry Baker and Mary Jane Dougherty, born February 13, 1855.⁵⁸

The Fort Wayne records are exceptionally interesting, carefully kept from the beginning by Father Badin, and pathetic too during the canal years when in times of epidemic the poor nameless Irish laborers died like flies. "Buried an unknown Irishman." "Another Irishman dead and buried in our ground," are followed by sixteen entries, one *Hibernus ignotus* after another.⁵⁹ Father Benoit and all the French priests marvelled at the faith of the poor Irish canal diggers. To this pastor's great regret he could not hear all who flocked to confession at Lagro as he had to return to Fort Wayne for Sunday Mass. One poor man died in his arms leaving him everything he had in the world, a hundred dollars.⁶⁰ The early priests followed them for miles along the line, and the poor Irish were the first contributors to the purchase fund of Cathedral Square.⁶¹

Despite the general satisfactory development along all lines, Saint Augustine's lost its pastor in 1852, only however for a time. In November of that year owing to a painful misunderstanding, Father Benoit left the diocese and spent eleven months in Louisiana, replaced as pastor of Saint Augustine's by the young French priest, Father Auguste Bessonies, who had succeeded him in 1840 at Leopold, Indiana. Mother Theodore repaid the many kindnesses extended to her Sisters in Fort Wayne by continual prayers for Father Benoit's return, and eventually, owing to intervention on her part, which smoothed away his difficulties, and to the open regret at his absence manifested by Bishop de Saint-Palais on his return from Europe,⁶² their former pastor was soon back again among his parishioners of Fort Wayne to minister to them uninterruptedly till his death.

Many links during over a hundred years have bound the Sisters of Providence to Fort Wayne. The most notable bond almost from the first, however, was the number and the distinguished character of the Sisters who entered the Community from Saint Augustine's. Before Father

⁵⁸ Fort Wayne Cathedral Records.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ A Mother Theodore, 8 novembre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

⁶¹ Most Reverend J. F. Noll, *Diocese of Fort Wayne*, p. 412.

⁶² A Mother Theodore, 8 novembre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

Benoit's death he counted twenty-five, and no other locality has had the distinction of contributing two superiors general to the Sisters of Providence: the eighth superior general, the late Reverend Mother Mary Bernard Laughlin, elected in 1938, and reelected in 1944, serving till her death in October, 1948, and Reverend Mother Euphrasie Hinkle, elected in 1883, who died in 1889. Among the earliest of the Saint Augustine recruits in point of time were the four daughters of Mr. Joseph Buchanan of Huntington, a Scottish Presbyterian, who had come to Huntington in 1836 and was converted in an all-night bout of controversy by Father Benoit. Elizabeth, later Sister Mary Antoinette, entered the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at Pentecost, 1849; her sister Mary, Sister Agatha, in July of the same year; Margaret, Sister Saint Felix, in 1852, and Sarah, the youngest, Sister Mary Bernard, in 1857. Sister Saint Felix, superior for many years at Highland, Vincennes, and Civil War nurse, died first, in 1879, Sister Agatha in 1901, and Sister Mary Bernard in 1904, but Sister Mary Antoinette lived to advanced old age, dying in 1914 after sixty-five years of religious life. Pupils at Saint Augustine's at the same time as the Buchanans were the two daughters of Mr. Robert O'Donald of Peru, Margaret, the elder, and Sarah. The latter entered on October 22, 1850, and her sister some six months later. After a long career on the missions Margaret, Sister Mary Angele, died in 1904, but Sarah, Sister Mary Ambrose, was for many years secretary and treasurer of the Community, known through her expert business dealings and her gracious correspondence from coast to coast of our country. She passed away April 30, 1917, at the age of eighty-five years. The second Sister Josephine, Mary Glutting,⁶³ the only one of this early band whose home was in Fort Wayne, entered about the same time, 1851. She, too, after many devoted years as a local superior, died the death of the just at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1906.

⁶³ Sister Mary Huberta's grandaunt.

CHAPTER XXV

OPENING OF SAINT VINCENT'S ACADEMY, TERRE HAUTE

"Terre Haute, though not a pretty city, is larger and finer than Vincennes."

MOTHER THEODORE

DURING the interregnum of eight months in the Vincennes diocese from the death of Bishop Bazin in April, 1848, till the news of Bishop de Saint-Palais's appointment was received in the following December, the mission of Terre Haute was planned and built. It opened under circumstances very different from those which had marked the beginnings of Fort Wayne, and harked back in a measure to the poverty of the earlier establishments. The Reverend Simon Petit Lalumière had been pastor of Saint Joseph's Church, Terre Haute, since 1842. He signed himself with the altered form of the name commonly used in Indiana and was known as Father Lalumiere.

During the years previous to Bishop Bruté's arrival in Vincennes, Terre Haute when visited at long intervals by the Jesuit missionary Louis or Nicholas Petit from Saint Mary's College, Kentucky, by the Reverend Lawrence Picot, pastor at Vincennes, or by Father Lalumiere, was found to contain only one Catholic, Mrs. Susan Andrews Williams, and Mass was celebrated in her home. In 1837 at the time of Father Stanislaus Buteux's installation by Bishop Bruté as missionary in charge of Saint Aloysius's Church at the North Arm and of the small groups of Catholics at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and Terre Haute, five persons only were present at the Mass celebrated in Mrs. Williams's parlor or in James Farrington's house at Third and Locust Streets, where she lived for a time. When Father Buteux took up a temporary residence in Terre Haute three years later in 1840, but ten names, most of them Irish, were signed to a pledge to contribute to his support.¹

The Irish canal workers generally settled wherever they found opportunity along the line of construction, seeking employment in the rough work of the unskilled day laborer. From this source and from a tiny trickle of immigration from the mother country, and conversions of adult Protestants, the Catholic group in Terre Haute was slowly augmented. At the dedication of Saint Joseph's Church by Bishop de la Hailandière on July 26, 1840, some seventeen Catholics comprising the entire congregation assisted at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.² The Bishop's regret that so substantial a church had been built in Terre Haute where Catholics were so few, has already been noted. When Father Lalumiere arrived as pastor of Terre Haute, the adjacent stations, and the canal on December 21, 1842, he found many Catholic families and single men on the

¹ Saint Joseph's Church Record.

² An article in the Terre Haute *Daily Express*, May 21, 1869, written probably by the Reverend J. B. Chassé.

canal, and in Terre Haute a "fine and neat church but hardly any Catholics, only a few families . . . little to encourage and much to discourage."³

Growth continued during succeeding years very slowly. "We have but a small congregation and they with but few exceptions, are very poor, living by daily labor of the hardest . . . many of them hired servants in Protestant families," wrote Mrs. David Linton to Mother Catherine Spalding in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1845.⁴ "Our worthy convert, Mrs. Linton," Father Lalumiere called her, and she describes herself as the spiritual child of the Nazareth, Kentucky, Sisters of Charity, "another of us whom Nazareth has given to God." The number of Catholics in Terre Haute was now however about sixty, and gradually a larger congregation part Irish and part German grew up. A steady stream of German immigrants, many of them skilled artisans, began to flow into Terre Haute in the late 1840's, and from that time a notable increase appears in Saint Joseph's parish roster.

Not all the Terre Haute Catholics, however, were of the servant class, Mary Linton was the daughter of General Arthur Patterson, a wealthy pioneer merchant in Rockville, Indiana. In 1832 she had married David Linton, a brother of William C. Linton, both prominent in the early business development of Terre Haute. Her husband died in 1835, but she continued to live in the handsome Linton home he had built in 1831 in the center of the block on Sixth and Ohio Streets.⁵ Her daughter Margaret, later Mrs. Jose Madrigal, was a pupil at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from 1844 to 1850. The spacious grounds of Mrs. Linton's home across the street from Saint Joseph's Church were the scene of the Corpus Christi procession of the school children in white to the three outdoor altars erected for Benediction after Father Bede O'Connor, O.S.B., became pastor.⁶ After Judge Elisha Mills Huntington married Mrs. Susan Rudd McHugh of an old Maryland Catholic family in 1841, she was driven to church every Sunday by her negro coachman who was also a Catholic, until they left Terre Haute in 1848.⁷

Mr. Patrick Shannon, president of Shannon's Bank, the oldest similar institution in Terre Haute, and the Griswolds, Duffcys, and Lambs were others of the early Catholics. The two brothers Thomas and John Dowling, long identified with the *Wabash Courier* and the *Wabash Express*, did not then appear among Terre Haute Catholics despite their Irish name and birth, but the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods church register records the baptism by Father Buteux July 27, 1837 of Charles Fenelon Dade Dowling, son of Mr. John Dowling and his wife.⁸

³ Saint Joseph's Church Record.

⁴ Original in Nazareth Archives.

⁵ Still standing at 521 Ohio Street.

⁶ Her sister Sarah married Demas Deming, one of Terre Haute's leading pioneer citizens; another sister, Margaret, married John P. Usher, noted Terre Haute lawyer who later became Secretary of the Interior in Lincoln's Cabinet; and their brother, Chambers Y. Patterson, was one of Terre Haute's early judges and some time mayor. Mrs. Linton is said to have been present at Father Lalumiere's death on May 25, 1857, and her brother Judge Patterson with Firmin Nippert and Dr. John Isidore Baty were witnesses to his will.

⁷ The judge entered the Church only towards the end of his life.

⁸ Thomas and John Dowling paid five dollars to the support of Father Buteux in Terre Haute in 1838.

To the still strongly Protestant town which numbered only approximately four thousand inhabitants in 1850, Father Lalumiere had commended himself originally as a native American at a time when most of the Indiana priests were still French, and later by his own upright and kindly character. The *Wabash Express* announced his Christmas and Holy Week sermons. Protestants were invited to hear him during several years "at early candle lighting" on Holy Thursday on the Real Presence and on Good Friday on the Passion. He had many close friends among the non-Catholics of the little city, among them Colonel Richard W. Thompson, who induced him to join the Whigs, a somewhat surprising procedure in view of that party's anti-Catholic tendencies and later affiliation with the Know-Nothings. Father Lalumiere's duties all during these years carried him along the canal as far north as Lafayette and into the surrounding territory in Indiana to small isolated Catholic groups in Clinton, Merom, and Montezuma. Sister Saint Francis Xavier tells us that he could not cope with the work upon the canal where the poor Irish laborers came to confession in crowds of thirty or forty.

Mrs. Linton gives an intimate picture of Saint Joseph's Church, "alone out on the prairie" in 1845, with but one Mass at ten o'clock on Sunday for which the Irish serving maids, detained by their domestic duties, were often late:

We have church nearly every Sunday and sometimes Mass during the week . . . a pretty church and little parsonage by it, a clergyman stationed here. We have a nice carpet in the sanctuary and everything necessary for the altar but a purple vestment for Lent. We have to use an old crimson one, but by next Lent we will try to have one. We have got an organ that cost \$350 . . . and we have just got a nice carpet for Mr. Lalumiere's parlor. We are getting along as to the temporals of the church very well, and we are praying for the conversion of ourselves and all sinners and heretics.⁹

Father Lalumiere had been among the first of the Indiana clergy to petition for a colony of Sisters before he left Washington, Indiana, but three successive ventures in Catholic Daviess County had already failed: the Nazareth Sisters' short-lived mission at Black Oak Ridge in 1832 and the equally unsuccessful attempt at Saint Peter's undertaken by Father Sorin and his Brothers in 1841; also a third attempt at Saint Peter's by the Sisters of Providence which has already been told.

The town of Terre Haute had seemingly forgotten in 1848 its early anti-Catholic prejudice and was evidently destined to grow. Anti-Catholic sentiment in America has waxed and waned in a series of more or less regular cycles, all of which had repercussions in Vigo County. The Nativist agitation of the 1830's and 1840's yielded to the Know-Nothing movement of the 1850's and to the A. P. A. and Ku Klux Klan activities which recurred respectively in the 1890's and 1920's. The second half of the 1840's marked a lull in this periodic upsurge, however, and the intolerance experienced by the Sisters during their first years had largely died away in Terre Haute. When Father Lalumiere again asked for Sisters in 1848 Mother Theodore was willing, therefore, to make every effort to accede to his request. His plan was to purchase a site and open

⁹ Mary Linton to Mother Catherine Spalding, March 6, 1845. Copy from original in Nazareth Archives by courtesy of Rev. Albert G. Wicke.

a subscription for funds. Mother Theodore was to erect and operate the school. To this she agreed tentatively although she knew that as the Catholics of the town were still comparatively few and poor, the financial burden would fall in the main upon the Community.

Though he had not yet received a final promise from Mother Theodore, Father Lalumiere proceeded at once on June 23, 1848, to acquire the very desirable corner lot, number nine of the original 1816 plot of the town, adjacent to number ten which had been purchased in January, 1837, by "Simon Gabriel Bruté of the County of Knox" for five hundred dollars, and upon which Father Buteux's church of 1840 was standing. The new acquisition on the northwest corner of Fifth and Walnut Streets had already been used years before for school purposes, and a small two-story brick building remained upon the premises. Curtis Gilbert, one of Terre Haute's pioneer business men, had bought both lots, the school and the church sites, in 1827 for five dollars. Some years later fifty-three interested persons organized an association known as the Terre Haute School Society for the purpose of erecting and maintaining a school, and to them Mr. Gilbert sold his two lots for ninety dollars in September, 1831. The one-room school building with living quarters above, long known as the "old brick school house," rose gradually by means of contributions of labor, of lumber or brick, and in a few cases of money from almost every family in the town, and within its walls a succession of schoolmasters wielded the birch over the youth of Terre Haute. Many of the city's early business and professional men appeared there in the capacity of teachers or pupils, among them the Honorable W. D. Griswold, whose daughter Laura was a Saint Mary's girl of the 1860's.

Eventually, however, the building became too small, and at the request of the stockholders both lots were sold, the church site coming into the possession of Bishop Bruté. The "old brick" also though long vacant was destined to a future career of many years of usefulness in the service of religion, years during which the pursuit of the three R's was to continue with a background of murmured prayers and the shrill melody of childish voices in age-old Catholic hymns. The old building though in need of repair was still sturdy and usable, and Father Lalumiere thought it could be incorporated with the projected combination convent and school. He now had possession of the site and had opened the subscription on Saint Vincent's day, July 19, 1848.

The final decision by the Community was taken only several weeks later on August 12, when the Council met and deliberated upon his proposal. His many kindnesses were no doubt taken into consideration as although his subscription, he said, was proving satisfactory, the councilors knew it would never suffice for the projected building operations, and as the Community funds were now at a low ebb, the necessary money would have to be borrowed, a procedure which was still anathema to the careful French Sisters.

In the hope that we might fulfill the end of our sublime vocation, wrote Mother Theodore in the minutes of the Council meeting of August 12, 1848, we accepted the condition . . . namely, to supply the remainder of the cost and other improvements, and to furnish the house and school. . . . The revenue from this house, as

from all the others which we have established, will be our trust in Divine Providence.¹⁰

That she was able to finance this new project for the glory of God is an outstanding tribute to her own business ability. The two recently erected wings to the academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had been a heavy drain upon the Community's resources, and during this summer of 1848 she was also arranging to purchase for three thousand dollars payable in five years¹¹ the house and lot on Third Street in Madison where the Sisters had been domiciled since 1844. Nevertheless, as soon as the important affairs of this momentous summer were dispatched, she turned with her usual characteristic energy to the work of building and equipping Saint Vincent's Academy, as the new house in Terre Haute was to be called.

The summer and autumn of 1848 were a period of suspense and anxiety in the diocese, for not till December 8 was the eagerly awaited news of Bishop de Saint-Palais's nomination received at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Rumors of all sorts had been rife in the diocese, and sickness also was general. As the weeks wore on into the depths of the great midsummer heat, fevers prostrated the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. One day in early August, Mother Theodore noted in the diary that Sister Saint Francis Xavier, Sister Angelina, Sister Agnes, Sister Gabriella, Sister Caroline, and Sister Monique were all ill. On another day four of the postulants were being cared for, and a little later Sister Mary Cecilia fell ill and languished for a month despite the utmost care and a hurried visit to Vincennes to consult Doctor Baty.¹² She gradually recovered on the approach of cooler weather, but even before this oppressive summer Sister Angelina's health had given increasing cause for anxiety. Doctor Ezra Read of Terre Haute, one of the city's best physicians, was studying her case, but Mother Theodore had already begun to fear, as eventually proved to be the case, that she was consumptive.

Saintly Father Deydier of Evansville was designated by the diocesan administrator, Father de Saint-Palais, to give the retreat to the Community again this year, a fact which automatically fixed the date of opening the exercises after the patronal feast of his parish, August 15. He had arranged to stop en route for a few days at Sainte Marie with the Picquet family and their colony, who had no priest, and was planning that his trip would be an opportunity for Miss Linck from Evansville to see her sister, Sister Mary Magdalen, at Saint Mary's and to exchange visits with *ces demoiselles*, the Picquet young ladies. Despite the difficulties of transportation sociability flourished in Hoosierdom in the 1840's. Father Deydier arrived on August 19 at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and the retreat opened that evening in the now crowded little convent chapel with the usual *Veni Creator*, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and conference by the retreat master. At the closing ceremonies on August 27, presided over by Father Corbe, three postulants were received, Sister Alphonse, Caroline Brutscher; Sister Victoire, Mary Ann Eckert; and Sister Benedict, Margaret de Poel. At the same time Sister Mary Cecilia pronounced her final vows.

¹⁰ S.M.W.A.

¹¹ Community Diary.

¹² *Ibid.*

Sister Alphonse and Sister Victoire represent a new type of young woman of German birth who from now on sought admission to the novitiate. The earliest German postulants had been through lack of early opportunities fitted only for domestic service. From now on young women who had received an excellent education in Europe in the German schools of the day joined the Community and in many instances gave long years of valuable service as teachers in German schools.

The childhood story of Sister Alphonse resembles Saint Teresa's. She was born in Bavaria. As a child her devotion to the Passion was phenomenal, and she ruined the devotional books in the family by scratching the faces and destroying the eyes of the pictures of Our Lord's executioners. Her ardent childhood desires of martyrdom were shared by a brother. One day to test her courage he thrust a pen-knife into her foot, but the resultant copious flow of blood checked any further similar experiments. Educated in a convent where her aunt was superior, Caroline began after her return home to long for the missions. A visit to a celebrated Tyrolese mystic¹³ confirmed her in her aspirations. This venerated personage urged her to be faithful and promised her the special protection of the Blessed Virgin. Accompanied by another young girl she embarked for America. They entered first an incipient Community still in its tentative years. Not finding there the religious spirit which she sought, Caroline set out again and was directed to Saint Mary's where she entered the novitiate on Christmas Eve, 1846. Knowing no French or English, she found the early weeks extremely painful, but she was quick and attentive and learned very rapidly. At the close of her novitiate she was sent to Madison. Here her health failed, and some months rest was necessary to enable her to join the foundresses of Terre Haute where a German teacher was badly needed. She later gave thirty years as a model religious to the Community, as teacher and local superior, dying in 1873.

Sister Victoire entered the novitiate from Jasper in 1847, a few months after her arrival from Germany. She was employed at first as sacristan, and later given charge of the vineyard. Her beautiful singing voice and her complete knowledge of Plain Chant had remained her own secret until one day someone heard her singing at her work in the vineyard. An investigation led Mother Theodore to place her in charge of the choir. She spent her life in the labors of the sacristy and the vineyard, her dearest privilege the care of the grapes for altar wine and the making of altar breads. Once during a sudden storm she was all but killed in the vineyard by a stroke of lightning, which shattered her health. She lingered some years longer of fervent religious life and died the death of the saints on October 7, 1884.

Sister Benedict was born in Holland and after some years was appointed to the care of the convent refectory at Providence, a post which she faithfully and piously fulfilled till incapacitated by extreme old age some years before her death in 1907.

An event of the summer of 1848 which was epoch-making in the history of the Community was the first regular election of assistants to the

¹³ Probably the famous ecstatic and stigmatist, Maria Mörl of Kaltern in the Tyrol, 1812-1862.

superior general, in the effort, as Mother Theodore said, "to put some organization into our poor little enterprise." She had given much prayer and consideration to the matter, and her failing health was making it a necessity. The Community was growing steadily if not rapidly, and her large correspondence, the care of the temporalities, of the farm, the continual repairs and improvements, the accounts, and the planning and supervision of building operations, which were almost continuous for seven or eight years during this time, added to her frequent journeys and the care and instruction of the Community, had become an almost crushing burden.

Her circular of this year inviting the missionary Sisters to the retreat directed their attention to the important work of the elections. As the Community was still too young to permit entire conformity to the requirements of the Rule, Father Corbe as Ecclesiastical Superior included all the professed Sisters in the electoral body and offered in nomination all those Sisters professed in 1845 and earlier, not a large group, though it included the original French Sisters and some six or seven others.

Notwithstanding the trials through which it has pleased Our Lord that we should pass, He has deigned to bless our Congregation. It has grown in the shadow of the Cross, which still covers it, and we hope that our Heavenly Father will never deprive us of this precious mark which distinguishes His children and His works. It is time to begin to organize ourselves, as much as possible, according to our Rules and Constitutions. My duties have multiplied to such an extent that it is impossible for me to fulfill them. I feel deeply the need of sharing a burden which I can no longer carry alone.

Having seriously weighed the matter before God, I come, my very dear daughters, to beg you to choose from among you a Sister who has the spirit of her state and your confidence, to give me as my First Assistant. Another office, not less important, that of Mistress of Novices, must also be filled. The person having this charge should have the graces as well as the obligations of the office.

You understand, without doubt, how important these first nominations are. On them depend the success and all the future of a work which is the highest object of our hopes, and which has already cost so many sacrifices. Prepare yourselves, then, for this great action by fervent prayers and Communion. I would do you an injustice to fear that in your choice you would be influenced by any other motives than the glory of God and the good of a work for which you have sacrificed so much.¹⁴

The circular was dated July 14, and Mother Theodore wished the Sisters to leave the missions as soon afterwards as possible. "Come as soon as you have everything in order, and console by your presence the one who loves you very tenderly in Our Lord."¹⁵

It was a solemn moment when on August 26, the last day of the retreat, the professed Sisters assembled to make what they knew to be the initial momentous change in their government. They were now to divide for the first time the authority and responsibility of the Foundress, which with rare wisdom they had hitherto guarded so jealously, and were to trace in a certain measure the future destiny of the Community, so great, so pervasive, so lasting in its results is the power of a religious superior. The little Community had passed through long years of bitter

¹⁴ *J. and L.*, p. 261.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

trial and more than once had skirted dangerously the gulf of annihilation. God had nevertheless preserved it and had singularly blessed it. Backward glances over their past brought a silent welling up of gratitude in every heart before they turned to the compelling task before them.

The two excellent priests who had shared the sorrows of *les années de nos épreuves*, Fathers Deydier and Lalumiere were present, and Father Corbe as Ecclesiastical Superior, presided. When the votes were finally counted, Sister Mary Cecilia was found to be elected First Assistant, Sister Saint Francis Xavier Second Assistant and Mistress of Novices. Unlike the pseudo-election of 1843 during Mother Theodore's absence in France, when the slips taken from the Bishop's hat proved the choice unanimous, the votes this time were not unanimous. They were almost so, however, as the Foundress announced; Sister Saint Francis received all but one vote as Mother Mary learned in a later confidential letter. Insisting that Mother Mary always had two votes, the chapter accorded the same privilege to Mother Theodore. At the close of the ceremony they suspended from her neck the four-inch white cross once worn by Mother Mary at Ruillé, with the words *Supérieure Générale* carved on the back, which Bishop de la Hailandière had never permitted her to wear. Next day it had disappeared, put away, the recipient said, for great occasions. The séance closed with the solemn chant of the *Te Deum* from full hearts. On that August day the Community entered upon a new phase of its existence when to a certain extent a new influence would be at work and another spirit mingling though long unperceived, with the original temper of the Community.

And what of their choice? Upon Sister Saint Francis Xavier there is but one verdict. She was now thirty-two years of age, fully formed, loved and venerated, her sanctity apparent and recognized, her influence destined to grow constantly within the Community and outside till her saintly death seven years later. With her the novitiate, the hope for the future, was safe. In Sister Mary Cecilia, despite her evident and exceptional endowment, the Community had not received an equal gift. At thirty-three, though she had proved herself an outstanding teacher and was now advanced to Sister Basilide's post as superior of the academy, she was not spiritually or intellectually of the heroic calibre of either Mother Theodore or Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Mother Theodore loved her tenderly however, and was satisfied with her evident efforts to practice virtue.

"I am consoled," wrote the Foundress to Mother Mary, "in seeing how much progress Sister Mary Cecilia has made in virtue since you saw her. She seeks God with all her heart. She took perpetual vows this year. I am happy to see that she has the esteem of the Community. She will be very useful if she lives, but she is not at all strong."¹⁶ Her lack of sound Catholic training in her early years and her racial characteristics militated against her as a religious superior. Sister Francis Xavier adverted to this fact sometime later in writing to Bishop Bouvier. "As a teacher Sister Mary Cecilia is preeminent; as an assistant she leaves something to be desired," and although she was to live to advanced old age and eventually was to govern the Community for twelve years, the

¹⁶ 5 septembre, 1848. S.M.W.A.

mantle of Elias fell not upon her. Far away across the sea in the sanctified family circle of an old-time French Catholic home, God was preparing another upon whom the sacred spirit of the Foundress would eventually descend and rest and who, trained and inspired by her, would after her death guide and guard the Community for almost thirty years.

Upon the close of the retreat next day Sister Mary Cecilia took up her duties as superior of the academy, and Sister Basilide prepared to leave for Madison, where she was to remain in charge of the house as superior for eight years till after Mother Theodore's death in 1856. No time could now be lost in the departures as September with its imminent opening of classes everywhere was almost upon them. Logan was driving the Fort Wayne Sisters across the bridge to Terre Haute where they were to take the stage as the canal was not yet completed. A little later in the opposite direction he piloted the Jasper and Vincennes Sisters to their destination. On August 30, Mother herself was accompanying Sister Basilide and her group to Madison to arrange the terms of the purchase already referred to. She was soon back again however after a hurried trip, accompanied by five students from Indianapolis for the academy.

Despite the weighty affairs which had engrossed the thoughts and prayers of the Community during this momentous summer, work had begun in earnest on the new building at Terre Haute. As soon as possible, accordingly, on August 28, amid the bustle and hurry of departures, "our men went with the oxen to haul the brick to begin the house at Terre Haute."¹⁷

The two recently elected assistants were now in a position to relieve Mother Theodore of certain definite duties, Sister Mary Cecilia by taking full charge of the academy, its correspondence and accounts, Sister Saint Francis Xavier of the supervision and instruction of the novitiate. The building at Terre Haute required constant attention and eventually took much longer than had been anticipated. The subscription, which had been opened in July by Father Lalumiere, proved disappointing, and Mother Theodore was advancing money in sums of two hundred dollars at a time all during the autumn. He had immediate supervision of the work, but delays and obstructions were frequent and necessitated repeated trips by Mother Theodore to direct and urge on the work. From her experience in erecting the wings to the academy, she now knew the best workmen and the prices of brick and stone and labor in Terre Haute, and was facilitating operations by providing the necessary materials well in advance of the time when they would be needed.

The work proceeded steadily if not rapidly. In mid-September the workmen were cutting the stone at the quarry at Pottsville, and by October the flooring and interior furnishings were appearing on Mother Theodore's accounts. At the end of the month the bricklayers had the house almost ready to roof, and a brick cornice was decided upon. Almost a month later, however, on November 20, 1848, Mother Theodore was writing to Sister Basilide at Madison:

I thought I could tell you many things this morning and write you a long letter, but I am compelled to leave at once for Pottsville and to go from there to Terre

¹⁷ Community Diary.

Haute. I cannot express to you all the trouble that this house in Terre Haute is giving me. It is not advancing rapidly, yet we must open school there in a few days. Pray God to bless it. Sister Saint Vincent is often distressed. I do not know what will become of her there.¹⁸

Cold weather had come very early amid the labor of gathering the harvest at Saint Mary's, and a two-day hail storm in September caused such a drop in the temperature that fires were necessary in all the houses. School had opened at the academy and the pupils arrived gradually with the leisurely interest of the frontier. The Reverend Administrator of the diocese, "Mr. Saint Palace," as the Americans called him, was detained at Saint Mary's for two weeks with a prevalent and very contagious malady known as "sore eyes," which often recurred in early Indiana, probably a mild attack of conjunctivitis. There was illness among the pupils too, and all during these months requests for Sisters were pouring in from various parts of the diocese. Most of them required an initial financial outlay beyond the resources of the Community now burdened with the Terre Haute building project and the Madison purchase. The Reverend Joseph Rudolph, located at Oldenburg, was very desirous of having Sisters of Providence, and Mother Theodore was grieved not to be able to honor his repeated requests. Eventually he succeeded in interesting the Franciscan Sisters in Vienna, Austria, in founding the present flourishing convent and motherhouse at Oldenburg. An advantageous location to be purchased for six thousand dollars was offered at Evansville and a five-acre tract a mile from Logansport as a building site. Locations were also offered in Washington, Indiana, and in Indianapolis, which were regretfully deferred. Mother Theodore felt that thirty additional Sisters would hardly fill all the demands.

By December the house at Terre Haute was still not entirely ready for occupancy though classes were to open at the beginning of the new year. This was an entire month later than the date advertised in the *Wabash Courier* of November 18, which had announced the opening of Saint Vincent's Academy, "a day school for young ladies," in which the Sisters assured their prospective patrons of their "diligent and affectionate attention to cultivate the minds and form the hearts of the children that will be entrusted to their care." Mother Theodore had already assembled the faculty. Sister Anastasie, "one of our best daughters," as Mother Theodore described her to Mother Mary, had arrived from Vincennes some weeks earlier. Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer and Sister Agnes were already at the motherhouse. Sister Alphonse, who was to teach the German pupils in Terre Haute, had been too ill for any duty during the early autumn and was thought to be consumptive. She was now convalescent and was to complete the little band of foundresses as soon as she had fully recovered.

The curriculum, modeled on the course of study at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and already advertised, comprised three general divisions. In the First Class were taught "Orthography, Reading, Writing, Grammar, Arithmetic, and every variety of Needlework," at three dollars per quarter of eleven weeks; in the Second Class the above subjects were continued

¹⁸ S.M.W.A.

with Geography, History, and Letter Writing in addition, at four dollars per quarter; in the Third Class, Ancient and Modern History, Composition, and "all the branches which constitute a thorough English education" were added at six dollars for the quarter. The highly prized accomplishments were also offered in generous measure: "French, German, Piano lessons with the use of instrument, Drawing and Painting in water color, perspective, and taking views from nature, Oil Painting, Oriental Painting, and lessons in making Artificial Flowers." Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer and Sister Agnes were accomplished needlewomen. Sister Anastasie, carefully tutored by Sister Saint Francis Xavier, already showed the artistic taste and skill with brush and pencil for which she later became outstanding, and taught by Sister Angelina, she was now also a good musician. Sister Alphonse gave the German lessons, and all the Sisters were adept in fashioning the pretty and popular artificial flowers, a branch which figured on every convent program of the day.

The early onset of winter had been followed by excessive cold and snow during the first week of November, and in December, after torrents of rain for a week the river was out of its banks, higher than for twenty years. Parts of the Wabash and Erie Canal between Covington and Terre Haute had been entirely destroyed, and great quantities of driftwood piled against the piers were menacing the Terre Haute bridge over the river. Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was now completely isolated, as the bottom was impassable even on horseback. Although the building was not entirely finished, the opening of school in Terre Haute could not be delayed any longer, and Mother Theodore had resolved to make a beginning the day after New Year's. The water in the river bottom abated somewhat, and the Sisters' effects were sent on in advance a few days after Christmas.

"They will leave tomorrow, feast of Saint Simeon" [December 29], wrote the Foundress, and she accompanied them. Sister Saint Vincent's ancient timidity required much encouragement, and Sister Alphonse was kept at Saint Mary's till the hard work and extra privations of the first days were over. The ferry was plying as usual in flood times between the bridge and the bluffs, which are now within the domain of Saint Mary's, but the service was irregular and the bottom itself in a very dangerous condition. "I returned in a wagon," wrote the Foundress on December 29. "The bottoms are frightful. It is at the peril of one's life that they are crossed. Several carts stuck fast and were left there."¹⁹

The original number of pupils at the opening of Saint Vincent's Academy, twenty-eight, was a disappointment, although prospects were bright for an increase as the school became better known. The building, now finished exteriorly, was sturdy and attractive. It was the only edifice outside the immediate precincts of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods erected by the Foundress, and after withstanding the wear and tear of daily use for ninety-four years, was razed only in 1940. Strongly reminiscent of Saint Augustine's, Fort Wayne, it had the same interior plan of two stories and basement. It had also the two large rooms on the main or school floor with central hall and stairway, and the kitchen and dining room below stairs seen in so many homes of the period. A slender curving double flight

¹⁹ Community Diary.

of stone steps with wrought iron balustrade mounted from the sizable grass plot on Fifth Street to the principal entrance on the first floor above the front basement door. Next to Saint Joseph's Church and across the street from Mrs. Linton's palatial residence and ample grounds, the locality was still retired although no longer "out of town" and far from "the din and distractions of business" as it had been when chosen by the Terre Haute School Society in 1831.

Despite the quasi-boom which followed upon the completion of the Wabash and Erie Canal in October, 1849, Terre Haute was not greatly altered from the little river town of a few years earlier. Work on the canal had gone on for months within and near the city limits till the water was turned on, and on October 25 the first two boats arrived, the *E. A. Hannegan* and the *G. R. Walker*, the latter all the way from Toledo.²⁰ The long expected event was marked by a civic celebration, a pleasure ride with a band, and a dinner and toasts at the Prairie House. The big ditch ran obliquely through the town entering near the river from the north. Flowing down Canal Street along the outskirts to the basin at Ninth Street, the three horses trotting tandem along the tow-path some fifty yards ahead of the boat, it passed under ten high wooden bridges at the principal streets and left the town at the southeast.

The Prairie House, now the Terre Haute House, a large barrack-like four-story structure among the cornfields on the edge of the town, which the philanthropist Chauncey Rose had built upon a corner of his farm, had been closed for eight years. Later linked by an omnibus line with the Court House Square, it was reopened in May, 1849, under the management of the genial host and *raconteur*, Toussaint C. Buntin of Vincennes. Terre Haute had by this time developed an "upper crust," and what the élite found in 1851 when they left their suburban farms for the winter months or when their independent American help suddenly left them, or when they dined occasionally with friends at the Prairie House, is detailed in the graphic description of the English traveler Richard Beste in his book on *The Wabash*.²¹ Called by "the hateful gong" at one o'clock, from fifty to one hundred people "of a class far superior to anything I had expected to find here, some few of them evidently gentry by birth and education," seated themselves in "a room of handsome dimensions" at a "table laid out with great neatness and propriety . . . Mr. Bunting [sic] our fat landlord, dressed in the height of fashion with carving knife and fork in hand, politely guided us to our places and then took his stand at a side table which groaned under a profusion of . . . well cooked joints." A respectable-looking negro waiter in charge was assisted by a dozen barefoot boys in white jackets who tumbled over one another like boys at leap frog in their eagerness to serve a "very liberally supplied" and "very well dressed dinner." Mr. Beste gives a special meed of praise to "Mr. Bunting's breakfasts" at seven o'clock where one saw

. . . ranged down the table and cut in slices, hot and cold bread of different sorts including corn bread [a little of which, Mr. Beste conceded, was rather nice with plenty of molasses and butter], little seed cakes, pancakes and fritters, milk, butter

²⁰ *Wabash Courier*, October 27, 1849.

²¹ London, 1855.

buried in large lumps of ice, molasses, preserves, and blackberry syrup in large soup tureens. Besides these things there were hot beefsteaks, roast and boiled chickens, and various sorts of cold meat. To drink we had tea and coffee, and occasionally chocolate, with hot, cold, and iced milk, and white and brown sugar, all served by the same barefoot boys but who were otherwise neatly drest in white jackets and aprons.²³

Mr. Beste gives an attractive picture of the town as seen across a wide grassy meadow from the Prairie House windows, "Neat garden palings enclosing evergreens and flowering shrubs that overhung a wide footway and sheltered the trim houses within. Beyond, over and among the trees . . . arose the houses, stores, and buildings of the town—some of framewood, some of brick, while through and above all peeped spires and towers of churches."²³

The little city was growing, and to Mother Theodore's keen eyes offered evidence of future progress far beyond either Vincennes or Madison:

It is certain that the town of Terre Haute will become one of the largest in Indiana, on account of its location, she wrote to Bishop Bouvier. They are already making railroads, canals, doing away with the obstructions in the Wabash which prevent the passage of steamboats, and so forth. They do here in one year what in the Old World would not be done in ten.²⁴

Among the improvements planned at this time at Terre Haute was a hospital to be offered to the Sisters of Providence. This work appealed very powerfully to the Foundress but could not possibly be considered without a contingent of trained Sisters from France. To Bishop Bouvier she wrote:

Some time ago I heard that the people of Terre Haute intend building a hospital in their city, and that they hope to have our Sisters take charge of it. If this news is true, it would be one of the most precious occasions of doing good that could be offered to us. It is impossible to say how much good we might do in fulfilling this portion of our Holy Rules; but it would be absolutely out of the question to undertake this work unless our dear superiors at Ruillé would furnish us with the means. We should require two or three Sisters formed by Sister Athanasius, or by someone else who understands how to manage a hospital. It seems to me it would be easier for our good Mother to find us persons thus qualified than persons to teach. I am confident that if you would ask this for us we should obtain it.²⁵

The needs and the progress of the new Saint Vincent's Academy, unfinished as it was, continued to require care and thought from Mother Theodore for many months, but on her return across the flooded river bottom on December 29 after installing the Sisters, another event of momentous importance loomed upon the horizon obscuring every other interest, the consecration and installation of the newly appointed Bishop of Vincennes. As soon as the news had reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods she had written to Bishop Bouvier:

We have just learned that we have a Bishop-elect, the Reverend Maurice de Saint-Palais. God has given us the one whom the whole diocese has earnestly asked for since the death of Bishop Bazin. He belongs to an eminent Christian family; three of his sisters are Daughters of Charity. I knew one of them at Angers. Father

²³ Beste, *The Wabash*, vol. 2, p. 69.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴ *J. and L.*, p. 277.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

de Saint-Palais made his studies at St. Sulpice, where he was ordained. It was there that he became acquainted with Bishop Bruté, who brought him to his poor mission of Indiana. He has been working here for twelve years with zeal and success, doing incalculable good in the midst of the greatest privations. He built several churches, and in leaving each one of them was everywhere deeply regretted by the people, for the favor of possessing such a pastor was fully appreciated. It was he who came from Madison two years ago and brought over on the ice and snow of a rigorous winter our poor Sister Mary Liguori, who was in a dying condition.²⁶

Bishop de Saint-Palais was indeed for thirty years all that the brightest hopes, the most ardent wishes and prayers of the Community could presage. His years of benevolent care of the desolate and neglected orphan children of his flock have often been recognized and eulogized, but few have realized that his devoted care of the consecrated spouses of Christ was not less constant or less laudable.

No Breton, this generous, noble-hearted priest who was to occupy the See of Bruté, like Bishop Bazin, Maurice de Saint-Palais was a son of the south of France, the famous and historic *Midi*,²⁷ but unlike him, the new Bishop was comparatively young, nor had his physical powers been sapped by years in the enervating climate of the Southern States. At thirty-seven Bishop-elect de Saint-Palais was at the height of his physical and mental vigor. La Salvetat, his birthplace, a mountain village in the old province of Languedoc, lies in the center of a circle formed by the ancient towns of Toulouse, Montpellier, Albi, and Carcassone, the land of the medieval *troubadours*, which saw by turns the crusades against the Moors, the blossoming of *courtoisie* and the courts of love, and the fierce violence and excesses of the Albigensian Wars. The Bishop's ancestors had been till the Revolution lords of the district of Aussac and had won their title six hundred years earlier by a valiant defense of the local Bishop's palace. The integrity and probity of the line was expressed in the family escutcheon bearing a swan and the device *Albus inter albos*.²⁸

Baptized the day after his birth, November 16, 1811, Jacques Marie Maurice Landes d'Aussac de Saint-Palais was richly dowered. Nobility, old and honorable lineage, wealth, and vibrant Catholic piety were his from the cradle. The priest who baptized him predicted that he would one day confer honor even upon that ancient and distinguished line, and at a later date his parish priest foretold of him that he would one day be the glory of their mountains. He grew up an intelligent, handsome, and pious lad whose gaiety and open-hearted manners conferred a charm which won friends and admirers wherever he went. Originally destined for the army, he was offended by the irreligious atmosphere of his first college and transferred at his own request to one of the famous *petits séminaires* of Paris, Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet, later entering Saint Sulpice to prepare for the priesthood. The Revolution of July, 1830, drove the semi-

²⁶ *J. and L.*, p. 266.

²⁷ Eugénie de Guérin and her gifted brother Maurice were the Bishop's compatriots and contemporaries, and he is said to have paid her a farewell visit before leaving France in 1836.

²⁸ Azais, *Notice Biographique sur Mgr. Maurice d'Aussac de Saint-Palais, Evêque de Vincennes dans l'Indiana*, (Nîmes, Edouard Baldy, 1880).

narians forth, and Maurice de Saint-Palais, disguised as a workman, set out on foot for his home at La Salvetat. His elder sister, Sister d'Aussac, as she was called, was amazed to recognize her seminarian brother in the young *ouvrier* who stopped one day at the hospital of the Sisters of Charity at Angers.²⁰

In October, 1835, when he returned to Saint Sulpice for his last immediate preparation for ordination, a saintly missionary Bishop from America had been there in search of recruits for his faraway mission. When he was ordained on Trinity Sunday, 1836, Maurice de Saint-Palais, despite the grief and opposition of his mother, had already offered himself and been accepted by Bishop Bruté for the Indiana mission. He was given charge of Saint Mary's Church in Daviess County within a few months after his arrival at Vincennes and began at once the devoted career of a pioneer missionary visiting on horseback the scattered Catholics of the vicinity and sleeping on straw in a box under the altar of his poor little church. Internal strife and a threatened schism melted away before his Christ-like generosity and zeal in his next mission, Chicago, and when in 1844 he was sent to Logansport, he had already built two churches and accomplished an immense amount of good.

On his long and arduous missionary journeys through northern Indiana and Illinois he said Mass repeatedly at the old Bailly Homestead on the Little Calumet River where he met Eleanor Bailly, and learning of her desires for the religious life, directed her in 1841 to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, which had been established a year earlier. Logansport was the center of another poor district of widely scattered Catholics which Father de Saint-Palais left after three years of untold hardships for the flourishing and settled parish of Madison. Only at Bishop Bazin's earnest entreaty was he induced to accept a year later the post of vicar general and superior of the seminary at Vincennes. Some five months after the death of Bishop Bazin on October 3, 1848, he was named by Pope Pius IX fourth Bishop of Vincennes.

Young and gifted with the iron French missionary physical constitution, proof against every fatigue, zealous, energetic, experienced, familiar with the American language and customs, Monseigneur de Saint-Palais possessed in addition qualities of mind and heart which fitted him in a preeminent manner for his new post. His sound and mature judgment and his amiable and benevolent heart found expression in the distinguished manners of the French nobleman. His twenty-eight year episcopate was destined to catch up and knit together the ideals and energy which had suffered from the comparatively brief tenure of the early Bishops and to give to the Church of Vincennes an impetus and an organization which soon made itself felt advantageously to the remotest sections of the diocese.

All was not bright however in the vista opening before the Bishop-elect. Poverty pressed heavily upon him. Saint Gabriel's College, purchased at great sacrifices by Bishop Bazin, was a crushing financial burden, and the charity from Europe which had established the poor diocese of Vincennes was drying up at its source. "If the council of the Propagation of the Faith does nothing more for our poor Indiana," wrote Mother

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Theodore, "I do not know what will become of the clergy."³⁰ Fifty-one churches and chapels and thirty-five priests hardly sufficed for the rapidly increasing Catholic population of the state. Mother Theodore at once offered to meet an immediate expense by furnishing the Bishop's episcopal wardrobe, and Sister Olympiade was dispatched to Vincennes to begin her six-weeks task of making his new black and purple garments and *bonnets carrés*³¹ as the French Sisters called them.

The consecration was set for Sunday, January 14, feast of the Holy Name. As soon as possible Mother Theodore set out for Vincennes arriving on January 5, something over a week before the ceremony. The floods in the Wabash valley at Terre Haute had presaged worse conditions farther south, and she found that Father Corbe alone of the Indiana priests had reached Vincennes. Cholera was raging along the Mississippi River, and as Saint Louis and Cincinnati were daily menaced by steamboats crowded with refugees, Archbishop Kenrick and Bishop Purcell could not leave their dioceses. The inclement weather and the high water were making the arrival of any other prelates so uncertain that for some days the consecration itself was in imminent danger of postponement. "Here there are many difficulties and disappointments," wrote the Reverend John B. Chassé from Vincennes to Joseph Picquet at Sainte Marie, Illinois. "The poor Bishop is very much distressed."³² At last a telegram from Nashville announced the Most Reverend Richard Miles, Bishop of that see, and the Most Reverend Martin John Spalding, Bishop of Louisville, sent word that he also would be present. The Reverend Hippolyte DuPontavice would officiate as assistant in place of the third consecrating prelate required by the rubrics. The two Bishops of Nashville and Louisville arrived at last "in poor wagons over frightful roads and with the greatest difficulty."³³

The ceremony passed off with great dignity and solemnity, the music furnished by an excellent amateur choir from Sainte Marie, Illinois. "The consecration took place as it was described in the newspapers which you have read," wrote Father Corbe to Father Martin at Baton Rouge, "but what they did not report is that it was a day of happiness for the clergy of Indiana, a veritable family feast where everything happened to the satisfaction of all. Now we have a good Bishop."³⁴ The weather grew steadily worse after the consecration, and on the day itself a severe storm of sleet had rendered the streets of Vincennes almost impassable. This phenomenon always excited Mother Theodore's interest, and she often refers to it in her correspondence. "This is of frequent occurrence in America and forms a layer similar to molten lead or lava from a volcano, covering every object it falls upon and taking its form. Woe to the man or beast exposed to its violence."³⁵ The four Vincennes Sisters, Sister Marie Joseph, Sister Mary Margaret, Sister Michel, and Sister Rose were present at the ceremony, Mother Theodore also, and Sister Olympiade, but none

³⁰ *J. and L.*, p. 267.

³¹ The *bonnet carré* differed in some respects from the biretta.

³² Vincennes Cathedral Archives.

³³ *J. and L.*, p. 275.

³⁴ [janvier, 1849]. S.M.W.A.

³⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 275.

of the missionary Sisters braved the elements to make the journey, and the prelates and priests were exposed to great hardship in returning to their homes. A week later the Foundress started for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods

... in open wagons and with horses roughshod. They made particles of this polished surface fly up and go rolling on the ice, shining in the sun with a thousand colors. One might have fancied the horses were trampling under foot millions of precious stones, and that we were traveling in an enchanted country. The enchantment, however, was only for the eyes. Never did I suffer so much in traveling. We broke down four wagons, and finally our horses took fright four miles from Terre Haute and exposed us to the greatest danger. We were preserved only by a special protection from Heaven.³⁶

The new house at Terre Haute at once required renewed attention. Though the Wabash was frozen over, travel continued to be at once dangerous and difficult. The men were working at cutting ice on the river to be stored in the *glacière*³⁷ at Saint Mary's before the inevitable change in the temperature would cause the river to break up. During Mother Theodore's absence the two pet deer escaped to become no doubt the prey of the large and powerful Hoosier dogs which Mr. Beste, the observant Englishman at the Prairie House, remarked a few years later. Father Lalumiere presented the deed of the Terre Haute site to Mother Theodore in February, but the house was still not finished interiorly, and the expenditure was already far beyond the estimated four thousand dollars. Louis Alvey, who was now the Community carpenter and was living in one of the log houses on the place at Saint Mary's, was making the blackboards, desks, and benches for the classrooms and a teacher's platform. Potatoes, butter, milk, and other provisions were sent across the bottom when one of the Thralls boys went for mail, which still came at times to the Terre Haute office, or for other necessities.

The school had grown, and the Sisters now had fifty-two pupils, many of them daughters of Protestant parents attracted by the lessons in drawing and painting, in music and embroidery, and in fashioning artificial flowers, dispensed by the Sisters after school hours. In November, 1849, when Mother Theodore visited and examined the school, the enrollment had risen to ninety. She took the deepest interest in Saint Vincent's Academy and neglected nothing to make it prosper. Every now and then some new piece of furniture, spoons, china, and linen, or a carpet for the parlor appears in her account book next to planks and building materials. She sent the men to dig a cistern for the Sisters and in spring to plant young shade trees as Terre Haute is situated on a prairie. The public examinations, which had attracted so much favorable attention at Saint Mary's, were early established in Terre Haute, and the record of the children's success found a place in the Community Diary. "They answered well," was the Foundress's modest tribute at the end of the first year.

For some unknown reason the upper class began to decline in 1850 despite the redoubled care and attention of the teachers, and to give them all some pleasant diversion, Mother Theodore planned a May party at Saint Mary's. Logan and "little Hubert [Guthneck] with his oxen" went for the pupils and teachers in the morning and took them home at evening.

³⁶ *J. and L.*, p. 275.

³⁷ ice house.

In August of that year the Sisters had all returned at once to Terre Haute, as usual, after the retreat. The heat however was oppressive, and Mother Theodore brought them all home again for "a little relaxation." They had brief similar outings from time to time, sometimes coming home to make their monthly retreat in the quiet of Providence at Saint Mary's, and in a recurrence of "superb weather" in the late autumn of 1853, the academy girls and their teachers at Saint Mary's went to the woods for nuts and wild grapes, and the Terre Haute Sisters and their pupils joined them on the river bottom.

The enrollment continued to grow, and by September, 1855, Mother Theodore noted nearly one hundred and forty pupils. Two pianos had been needed for the twenty-six pupils for music. Gradually the close of school and the *distribution des prix* were advanced to what then seemed an early date, July 12. Saint Vincent's was now firmly established in the good graces of the people of Terre Haute. Richard Beste records in the work already cited the current opinion which he heard voiced at the Prairie House of the

... four nuns I know not of what order who lived in a house adjoining the church and took in day scholars such as Miss Read. The people of the town had long been anxious to have Sisters ... settled amongst them and had engaged to build them a house and provide for them as soon as the priest could procure them.³⁸ These shrewd Protestant calculators were so convinced of the good effected by that sisterhood that without reference to differences of religious belief, they were prepared to welcome and support them ... all find the Catholic monks and nuns the best instructors of their youth.³⁹

The "Miss Read" referred to above was Doctor Ezra Read's daughter, Okalla, twelve years old, who was a pupil at Saint Vincent's.

Mrs. Read herself, remarked Mr. Beste, was very well educated and played on the piano very well, but spent most of her time on the sofa or in the rocking chair.⁴⁰ ... Okey was a clever girl; she ... played and sang very well for her age, and she danced very nicely ... she was said to draw and sketch a little ... and did a great number of fancy works which she was taught by the nuns at whose school she attended every day and bore away more prizes than any other girl of her age.⁴¹ ... the young ladies' school at Terre Haute ... conducted by four nuns was attended by ninety pupils. Okey Read had won there numbers of books and patterns of fancy work as prizes for study and good conduct. Mrs. Read preferred the nuns' school. "I don't know how those Sisters manage," she said. "They make all the girls learn whatever they please, and after school hours they teach them all sorts of fancy work; that's the way Okey has learned so many, and all the girls are as fond of them as if they were their own mothers. They never meddle with their religion, but really I should not much care if they were to make my daughter a Catholic. It must be a good religion that makes them such sweet creatures. I got the Doctor to agree to let baby be baptized by Mr. Lalumiere."⁴²

When Richard Beste, his wife, and six children touring America with the prospect of buying property and settling here, arrived in Terre Haute

³⁸ Mr. Beste's information is not accurate here, as we have already learned who built and paid for the Terre Haute house.

³⁹ Beste, vol. 2, pp. 147, 149.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

in the summer of 1851, they little expected the long days of serious illness which kept them there during weary weeks, or the sorrow with which they left their little nine-year-old daughter in a lonely grave in what seems from the crude drawing which opens volume two of Mr. Beste's work to be the old burying ground on City Out Lot No. 3.⁴³ On his return to England Mr. Beste wrote his book *The Wabash, or Adventures of an English Gentleman's Family in the Interior of America* in which, pooling his observations with those of his children, he records many mid-western characteristics of the post-frontier period: the omnipresent piano in every ladies' drawing room, whether ashore or afloat "which is thumped upon by all who can play a dozen notes by heart"; the stumps standing in the very streets of the rising towns; the Westerners' universal politeness to women, "unequalled, unapproached even, by any class in any country"; the prevalence of the one universal luxury, "iced water"; the American scorn for stealing or pilfering, although they were not averse to sharp practice; their English spoken as a rule without provincial dialect or vulgarisms; their unwillingness to talk of themselves; the incipient conceit and affectation which Americans think so charming in their women; the intense heat of summer and the air swarming with insects; the immense power of public opinion and the independence of want in a country teeming with fertility; the inveterate habit of American mothers to spoil their children and of Hoosier men to wear their hats in the house; the magnificent contempt of money by American men when out of their counting houses, and the devotion of practically all American women to the rocking chair—these were diverse American characteristics as the Bestes saw them in 1851. Especially did they reprobate the "whining, pining, helpless, lackadaisical affectation of fine ladyism which the American sex appear to think so attractive," but Mr. Beste was clear-sighted enough to see the reverse of the picture, "They are loving, faithful, virtuous, thrifty wives, and most affectionate mothers."⁴⁴

Though this shrewd English observer could not but remark Mrs. Read's pride in her daughter's accomplishments and the general preference for the nuns as teachers of young girls, prejudice in Terre Haute was not dead by any means, and in 1851 the height of the Know-Nothing movement was only three years in the future. Sister Saint Francis Xavier tells of a letter written about this time by an interested friend to an old lady whose daughter was a pupil at Saint Vincent's:

"Dear Madam: Although I have not the honor of your acquaintance, the interest I take in your daughter prompts me to tell you that, if you leave her with the nuns, she will be lost. Twenty years from now she will remember the detestable principles she has imbibed there; and if she does not become a Catholic, she will at least defend the Sisters all her life and on all occasions."

The good lady replied that she was old enough to judge for herself and wise enough to know how to bring up her own children; that not only would she leave her daughter with the good Sisters, but that she herself, when her dear husband should be no more, would offer herself to the Sisters, not to teach in the boarding school, but to serve them in their houses, an office she would consider an honor.⁴⁵

⁴³ Statement by Mr. A. R. Markle.

⁴⁴ *The Wabash*, vol. 2, p. 323.

⁴⁵ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 291.

The opening of Saint Vincent's was a great convenience to the Foundress and to Sisters traveling to and from the missions as it obviated the nights in hotels and softened the long hours of waiting which were a concomitant of canal and stage coach transportation. In 1855 the missionary Sisters bound for Madison, Evansville, and Lanesville spent the night of August 30 at the Terre Haute convent in order to be able to take an early train next day. Often when the sound of the iron knocker on the front door echoed through the house, Sister Alphonse or Sister Anastasie, who rushed to open the door, would find Mother Theodore smiling outside upon the high stoop with Sister Saint Francis's sweet dark eyes looking over her shoulder. After they took her outdoor veil and mantle and exchanged greetings and the customary affectionate French double embrace, the Foundress at once began moving quickly about the house, the grounds, and classrooms observing desiderata for future reference and assistance. Then Louis Alvey would appear quietly next day to put up hooks for the children's wraps or to make some extra desks. At noon after her little tour of inspection the Foundress would take her place at the head of the Sisters' small dining table to share their frugal fare, and after the Latin grace her loving and inquiring glance would encircle the well known faces.

Beside her during the first two years as superior sat Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, but in 1851 Sister Anastasie moved into the coveted chair next Mother Theodore. "We have trained a young Sister who now replaces Sister Saint Vincent at Terre Haute," wrote the Foundress to Mother Mary. "Her house is getting along quite well; the Sisters are regular, charitable, and happy. It is a pleasure to see them so happy and good."⁴⁶ The training which Mother Theodore gave so generously to the young American Sister sometimes took a very practical turn. One day in her class Sister Anastasie noticed that one of the young ladies in the rear, far from attending to the lesson, was absorbed in a letter which she was reading. After a few minutes interval during which the culprit was seemingly lost to the world, she was rudely awakened by the teacher's voice ordering the offending letter and the offender to the desk. The former turned out to be what was technically known in Victorian times as a "love letter," and when Sister Anastasie signified her intention to confiscate it, its owner absolutely and positively refused to give it up. A battle royal ensued, which continued for several days and came eventually to the knowledge of Mother Theodore. Next morning she suddenly appeared at Saint Vincent's to see Sister Anastasie. She had made a special trip, she said, "to teach Anastasie a lesson," and the lesson was, never to ask a girl for a love letter. "She will give you her right hand or her eyes before she will give you her love letter, so never again, my child, be so foolish as to ask for it."⁴⁷

A few faculty changes occurred at Saint Vincent's from time to time, but the same names reappear as a rule from year to year. In 1850 Sister Agnes returned to Jasper, where she remained as superior to the end of Mother Theodore's life, and Sister Michel took Sister Alphonse's place with the German children when the latter was transferred to Fort Wayne.

⁴⁶ 26 janvier, 1852. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁷ Mother Anastasie's Reminiscences.

Sister Mary Antoinette, the eldest of the four Buchanan sisters from Huntington, spent several years in Terre Haute, and her sister, Sister Agatha, joined her in 1852. The next year Sister Anastasie was removed to open the important mission of Evansville.

The continued growth of Saint Vincent's Academy was satisfactory during all these years. The public school movement was slow in getting under way in Terre Haute and took on no notable development till the 1860's. The first public school did not open till September, 1853, in small and cramped quarters and, hampered by state and city restrictions, closed after a year.⁴⁸ The development of the Sisters' school was an index of an increase in the congregation so notable that in 1853 Father Lalumiere was obliged to build an addition to the church, thus making it, as the *Wabash Courier* announced, "the largest house of worship in town." The influx of desirable German families continued, outnumbering arrivals from any other locality. Many were staunch Catholics bearing with them the solid traditions of the faithful Rhineland provinces. Among the earliest were the four Hulman brothers, Francis, Herman, Dietrich, and Theodore, from Lingen in the old German province of Hanover. Their coming proved eventually a boon to the Church in Terre Haute, as Saint Anthony's Hospital and Saint Benedict's Church prove amply today. Other outstanding Germans who settled in Terre Haute during these years were the Proxes, the Mayers, Brinkmans, and Kaufmans, all of whom contributed materially to the growth of the city.

In the main Terre Haute, despite its prominence as a river town, escaped the periodical epidemics which were the scourges of these years. In July, 1849, when the Sisters in Fort Wayne and Madison were caring for cholera patients, Terre Haute had only a few cases, and in February, 1854, the Sisters closed their school for a brief period during a flurry of smallpox, but Saint Vincent's Academy continued to grow and flourish steadily in a developing Terre Haute.

⁴⁸ Beckwith, *History of Vigo and Parke Counties*, p. 135.

PART IV

THE YEARS OF PEACE

1848 - 1856

CHAPTER XXVI

INAUGURATION OF A NEW ERA UNDER BISHOP DE SAINT-PALAIS

"This good Bishop de Saint-Palais is
a true father to our Community."

MOTHER THEODORE

FRANCE, unique in a thousand ways has never been more so than in her women. What other nation has had a Maid of Orleans? And yet other countries in the inexplicable designs of God have suffered for centuries the identical domination which Joan of Arc was sent by divine Voices to end. Leo XIII has said that after Bethlehem and Calvary, the greatest fact in the world is Paray-le-Monial. The devotion to the Sacred Heart was taught to the modern nations by an obscure Frenchwoman, a cloistered nun. Today the wonders of Lourdes and Lisieux are bestowed upon mankind by the hands of other young French women hidden away in remote towns. From every walk of life they come, the heroic and saintly women of France, foundresses of every conceivable sort of good work. The earth is covered with a network of their benefactions, and from the French press flows perennially the silver stream of their biographies. Almost every French village has its heroine. One of these was Mother Theodore. Her years of sorrow so patiently borne prove it beyond a doubt. From her steadfast dark eyes looks forth all the heroic devotedness of countless generations of women of her race. Her work in the Indiana forest was by this time established, though the daily care of sixteen years of hardship and privation was necessary to consolidate it.

The saga of sorrow had been long and grievous, but the years of peace dawned at last upon the struggling Community in the wilds of Vigo County. The painful years of the foundation were now past, for with the consecration of Bishop de Saint-Palais a new and peaceful era opened before the Congregation of Providence in America. Security and quiet were now assured, and the new Bishop's fostering care could be counted upon to support the Community's every undertaking. They turned therefore with high hope to the bright promise of the future. Father Benoit's wish for Mother Theodore was touching upon realization, "Would to heaven that the new path opening before you may be less rugged, less thorny than in the past."¹

Eight years had now elapsed since the six French Sisters had stood with beating hearts upon the edge of the ravine in the gathering darkness of the memorable October evening of their arrival, eight years of anguish

¹ 30 décembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

and hardship borne with iron fortitude and illumined with the kindly light of hope. This indestructible hope was now realized, and God had had mercy upon them at last.

Sorrow and hardship had taken their toll however, and the two slender white crosses near the chancel of the village church marked the lives already laid down upon the altar of sacrifice. Of those who survived, the events of the past eight years had told most heavily upon Mother Theodore. She had been most deeply involved and had necessarily suffered most. Her health was now permanently shattered, a result attributable, as Father Corbe did not hesitate to say, to the moral crucifixion she had undergone, and especially to the painful occurrences at Vincennes in May, 1847.² Sister Saint Francis Xavier's existence also now hung by a thread. Of her Father Corbe wrote, "She has hardly a breath of life. Her energy alone keeps her up."³

The price had been heavy, but the fruits of patient suffering were now to be seen on all sides. The Community's almost miraculous escape from dissolution now appeared in its true light, and they also saw that, as Mother Mary remarked to Mother Theodore, "The brief apparition of Bishop Bazin at Vincennes seems to have had no other purpose than to consolidate your work by the approval of your Constitutions and the transfer to you of the property at Saint Mary's."⁴ The immense spiritual treasures they had drawn from their trials are an ever-recurring theme in their letters to France. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier. "Oh, yes, I hope that Our Lord will comfort us for we have wept much. . . . What great care He has taken of your poor daughters! How He has attached us to Himself. Blessed our crosses, our humiliation, our tears! They have purified our souls and taught us where to anchor our hopes . . . God has been our liberator."⁵

Founded upon the cross, the Community was now firmly established and was growing steadily in numbers and in religious spirit. All hearts welded together as one by their long years of trial, they rededicated their future to an inviolable devotion to their Rule and to their sublime vocation of bringing the knowledge and love of Our Lord Jesus Christ to the young souls of His flock in Indiana. For that Indiana, which had given them often in return only hunger and thirst and persecution from within and without, they were still yearly in increasing numbers binding themselves by vow to spend their pure young lives.

The Community now in 1849 numbered twenty-seven professed religious, six novices, and fourteen postulants, a satisfactory growth in pioneer Indiana for a period of a little over eight years. Though not yet out of the toils of poverty, they were able however to subsist and to expand, and though compelled almost yearly to assume increased financial obligations for new buildings or purchases, they felt that the spectre of seemingly hopeless debt would never again loom ahead to terrify and dis-

² A M. A. Martin, avril, 1848. S.M.W.A.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ 9 juin, 1848. S.M.W.A.

⁵ A Mère Marie, 2 novembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

courage. "As to the material aspect, our institution is consolidated," acknowledged the Foundress in June, 1849.⁹

The temporary subsidence of anti-Catholic bigotry contributed to the development of the schools of the Sisters of Providence, which now seven in number and adequately staffed, were growing yearly in success and prestige. Some six hundred children and young girls were now under their care at the Academy of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, in the village school, and at Jasper, Vincennes, Madison, Fort Wayne, and Terre Haute. Yearly groups of increasing size were carefully and prayerfully prepared for First Communion, and the piety and docility of the children in all the schools and their progress in their studies gave great consolation to Mother Theodore as on her annual tours she visited and examined them.

The entire twenty-eight years of Bishop de Saint-Palais's incumbency and especially the remaining seven years of Mother Theodore's life were a period of steady development for the Community. New schools were opened on an average of one each year, and the older missions continued to expand. The Bishop's wise encouragement and assistance were powerful factors for success all through these years, and in many cases his initiative pointed out new fields to the zeal of the daughters of Mother Theodore. Bishop de Saint-Palais was now to embark upon the program of development which practically transformed the diocese of Vincennes during the succeeding quarter of a century. Though his twelve-year missionary career in Indiana had familiarized him largely with its spiritual needs, he now projected an extensive tour of the diocese to be followed by a European voyage to procure supplies of clergy and funds.

The Indiana which had now become his spiritual charge was however totally different from the diocese to which Bishop de la Hailandière had been appointed ten years earlier. The Wabash and Erie Canal had had an immense influence upon the development of the state by attracting and transporting immigrants and securing the favorable attention of business men. The Western country was on a better financial basis, and Indiana was at last recovering from the orgy of spending which had brought on the financial panic of 1837 and ensuing years. The population concentrated in 1830 mainly in the old Gore or Whitewater Valley along the eastern boundary of the state and on the Ohio River, numbered 344,508. By 1840 it had reached 990,258, had in fact almost trebled, penetrating the mid-state and western counties with definite growth along the Wabash and in the north. At the close of the following decade, 1850, the first year of Bishop de Saint-Palais's episcopate, when the population had grown to 1,350,428, the development of the west and north was more deeply accentuated with large increases around the growing cities of Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Richmond, Lafayette, and South Bend.

Prosperity had now to a considerable extent spread its wings over Hoosierdom. In the 1850 decade farms more than doubled in value, and the growing wealth of the pioneers was already visible in their homes where the original log structures now appeared in the rear among the service buildings and a comfortable home accommodated the family. This was often a large frame house or one of the two-story red brick homes still to

⁹ 1 juin, 1849. à Mère Saint-Charles. S.M.W.A.

be seen in rural sections amid a clump of evergreens, set back from the highway, with rag carpets and high four-poster beds inside. More extensive knowledge of agriculture and of the possibilities of drainage, and better methods of cultivation were doubling the farmers' output. The Hoosiers were still in general also a law-abiding people, and serious crime was almost unknown.

Immigration was at its flood in the 1840's. The Catholic population of Indiana therefore, estimated in 1850 at fifty thousand,⁷ was continually on the increase. Confined in Bishop Bruté's time to the French Canadians and the Kentucky colonists who had crossed the Ohio to spearhead the settlement of Daviess County and the old North Arm, the number of the Catholic population had grown largely by the Irish and German immigration which gradually mounted to its peak some five years after Bishop de Saint-Palais's consecration. Fewer immigrants from Europe at this period located in Indiana than in any other state though their advent was unchecked as in Kentucky by a "Bloody Monday" of anti-Catholic riots and incendiarism. The number of the foreign-born, one in every ten, and their influence were now however considerable. One half were Germans, the next largest group was the Irish, many of whom had left the canal construction gangs to settle upon farms. The Irish immigrants were practically all Catholics, the Germans largely so. The former made up in the main the English-speaking congregations of the diocese, but the Germans initiated the custom of grouping in closed colonies holding rigorously to the language and customs of their homeland, a practice which persisted for many years. Indianapolis, Evansville, Fort Wayne, New Albany, and other places had colonies of Catholic Germans, and Jasper was almost exclusively German. Owing to their ignorance of English these groups could be reached only by priests of their own nationality. A corollary of the system was the necessity of providing German schools, as was done first in Fort Wayne during the year of the Bishop's consecration, as we have seen.

In order to observe conditions and needs at first hand Bishop de Saint-Palais had planned to embark upon his visitation immediately after his consecration. Several other urgent projects were however maturing in his mind, among them some measure of remedial care for the Catholic orphans of the diocese and the removal of the episcopal see from Vincennes. The Bishop's heart was still in Madison, and he was now thinking seriously of transferring his see and the motherhouse of the Sisters of Providence to the populous and promising town on the Ohio. He realized as Mother Theodore had done at once in 1840 that Vincennes, disadvantageously situated upon a small river navigable during only a part of the year, was destined to remain static. With no chance for a major share in the river trade, the town was also later to some extent to be by-passed by the railroads.

The spectacle of the flooded Wabash Valley in the winter of 1848-49 seemed to the Community a powerful argument in favor of considering again the oft-debated question of leaving permanently their always remote and sometimes completely isolated location at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

⁷ Noll, *The Diocese of Fort Wayne*, p. 56.

"It is very probable that the new Bishop will remove our motherhouse to Madison where he intends to fix his see," wrote the Foundress to Bishop Bouvier on January 8, 1849, before the consecration ceremonies had taken place. "The truth is that we are very badly located here. At the present moment we are entirely cut off from the world by the overflow of the Wabash which is higher than at any time since 1818."⁸ The Bishop's plans were based largely upon what seemed the prosperous outlook of Madison, and in fact, an ephemeral expansion continued there for a few years longer, and Catholics, especially immigrants from Ireland, flocked in. Mother Theodore did not entirely concur however in Bishop de Saint-Palais's estimate of the old town's future. "It seems to me," she wrote to Sister Basilide, "that your Madison is at its apogee. Our Terre Haute will rise higher."⁹ Some years later even so casual an observer as Richard Beste was not favorably impressed, "Maddison [sic] is said to be a very thriving place. It did not appear so to me but rather declining or stationary."¹⁰

Opposition to the proposed transfer was not lacking among the clergy. Father Corbe was very much averse to the measure and Father DuPontavice, pastor at Madison since 1847, not less so. On trying to dissuade the Bishop the two priests soon discovered how firm he could be when once embarked upon a line of conduct which his judgment approved. Indianapolis he does not seem to have considered, but Evansville with excellent prospects was offering him inducements. At Madison an episcopal residence would have to be built, also a new sanctuary and sacristies and an addition of thirty feet to transform Saint Michael's Church into a cathedral. For the proposed migration of the Community from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods much more extensive building operations would be immediately imperative. "Monseigneur de Saint-Palais is determined to come here to live," wrote Father DuPontavice in June, 1849. "Corbe and I, Mother Theodore and others have done everything possible to dissuade him. . . . He has it in his head, however, and it seems that what he has in his head is not in his heels."¹¹ Though the Bishop did not yield at once, the plan was eventually abandoned, and the transfer of the bishopric from Vincennes postponed for another thirty years.

A problem of greater urgency had been the seminary. Saint Gabriel's College, as reconstituted for Catholic boys and seminarians by Bishop Bazin, after the withdrawal of the Eudists and its purchase in 1848 by the diocese, had become an increasingly heavy financial burden. Father DuPontavice, who had replaced Father Martin as rector in 1846, had been transferred to Madison in November, 1847, and Bishop de Saint-Palais finally closed the seminary in September, 1848, some months before his consecration. Only a mere handful of students, the theologians, four or five in number, were retained, and they were accommodated in the Bishop's house with John Contin, one of their number, to coach them.¹² "We have two here at our expense," wrote Mother Theodore to Bishop

⁸ *J. and L.*, p. 268.

⁹ 11 janvier, 1850. S.M.W.A.

¹⁰ Beste, *The Wabash*, vol. 1, p. 249.

¹¹ Rev. H. DuPontavice à Msgr. de la Hailandière, 21 juin, 1849. N.D.U.A. The letters of this series are henceforth cited as DuPontavice Collection.

¹² Contin à M. Martin, 7 novembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

Bouvier in December, 1848.¹³ The seminarians described the Bishop as "sunk in debt" and unable to get any money from the Propagation of the Faith. In fact however the progress of the students and the general status of the seminary had not been such as to encourage the Bishop. Philip Doyle's case is perhaps typical. He sought a home with his brother William, who was now pastor at Ferdinand, and although the seminary reopened in 1850, he was not ordained till 1855.

These retrenchments and changes had left one group, the French serving maids, in great distress of soul. "The episcopal maids view the recent changes with uneasy hearts," wrote Philip Doyle to Father Martin. One of them, an old peasant woman known as Grosse Marie, was received by Mother Theodore. Accompanied by her little heifer Grisset, she arrived early in February, 1849, to care for the cows at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The poor old woman's life at her new home was however very short. In the following autumn pleurisy carried her off in five days. "We took the greatest care of her," noted Mother Theodore in the diary.

Sister Olympiade has just closed the eyes of a poor woman who came from France two years ago, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Mother Mary, and, who, abandoned by all, was received by that Providence which is the refuge of the miserable. After caring for our cows for six months, grumbling and smoking her pipe, yet showing always an excellent heart, she passed to a better life last Saturday evening. For the first time in my life—would you believe it?—I saw a person die. Oh, what a terrible ordeal is before us! Happily Our Lord will be there to help us.¹⁴

Some months later another of the college domestics arrived at Saint Mary's to enter the novitiate, Jeanne Février, well known in Vincennes later for many years, who had come to America with Father Martin in 1839. She seemed contented, but suddenly one morning Jeanne was discovered to be missing. Two days later she arrived on foot at the episcopal mansion in Vincennes, which for the rest of her long life she never left.

In February, 1849, about two months after his consecration, a much more distinguished guest arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, very simply on foot over the dreadful roads of that flooded winter, the new Bishop of Vincennes. At Madison he had been received with enthusiastic affection. "You gave the Bishop a grand reception; that was all very right," wrote the Foundress. "We Hoosiers of the woods will receive him with all simplicity."¹⁵ Nevertheless the Bishop's first visit in his episcopal capacity was an occasion of the utmost joy and was celebrated with all the *éclat* the Community could command. He remained for the feast of Saint Joseph, when he gave a conference to the Community and officiated at Vespers and Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament. In the evening he was present at an entertainment in his honor arranged to offer the homage and congratulations of the pupils. No record has come down to the present of this first of many programs by the Saint Mary's girls of that day for their beloved "Father Bishop," as they loved to call him, but no doubt French congratulatory verses sung to familiar airs, piano and vocal music, harp, and guitar, and the customary French dialogue

¹³ *J. and L.*, p. 267.

¹⁴ 28 octobre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

¹⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 283.

were prominent on an evening when every heart was filled with joy. Many years later Sallie Benbridge recalled with pride that hers was the privilege of presenting the felicitations of the school. The Bishop's amiable and charming manners delighted his audience, and he seemed a father among his children. Next day he left for Vincennes.

The Bishop's plans for the housing, support, and instruction of the orphans, a subject which to the end of his life occupied so much of his time and thought, had already matured in his mind. An orphanage had been among Bishop Bazin's cherished projects, but the poverty of the Catholics of the diocese as a whole deterred him from any attempt to realize this laudable ambition. Some few children had been in fact maintained in the "Female School" at Vincennes from the first, and Mother Theodore often refers to the little girls received at different times at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Shortly after the Bishop left in March, 1849, he sent her a little nine-year-old girl, Hannah Gannon, who was to be the nucleus of his orphanage to open at Vincennes in the ensuing August.

His visitation had got off to a belated start, and a necessary trip to Baltimore was now to interrupt it. In April the Bishop was at Saint Mary's again to secure the services of Father Corbe as his theologian at the Seventh Council of Baltimore, which was announced for the week of May 5. They left on April 17 for the long journey east, joined at Cincinnati by the Most Reverend John B. Purcell. Bishop de Saint-Palais, one of the youngest prelates present, took his place for the first time among the Conciliar Fathers and pronounced the customary oath at the solemn opening session in the Baltimore Cathedral on Sunday, May 6. Six private and three general congregations occupied the week, closing with Pontifical Mass on May 13. Archbishop Eccleston presided, as he had done at every council since the death of Archbishop Whitfield in 1834, with the consummate tact and warm hospitality which commanded the openly expressed gratitude of the prelates. The young Indiana Bishop and his theologian met in Baltimore the French and German Bishops who, like themselves, had contributed many years of hardship and privation as missionaries to the growth of the Church in America. They met also Bishop Kenrick of Philadelphia, his brother the Archbishop of Saint Louis, and Bishops Spalding of Louisville, Hughes of New York, and Fitzpatrick of Boston, all outstanding figures in the American Church in 1849.

The three new metropolitan sees of New Orleans, Cincinnati, and New York and five bishoprics and vicariates were asked of Propaganda by the council, and in response to an Encyclical Letter of Pope Pius IX to the Bishops of the world inquiring the status of devotion to the Immaculate Conception, a decree was passed asking the Holy Father to define it as an article of faith. The American Bishops were again going on record as they had done so commendably in 1846 as ardent promoters of the cult of the Immaculate Patroness of our country.

It is very gratifying to be a member of a Council in which by order of the Pope the question of the Immaculate Conception has been discussed, wrote Father Corbe from Baltimore. Yesterday the subject occupied the entire day, and all the Bishops of the world are to deliberate upon it. Undoubtedly it will be declared an article of faith. I am happy to contribute to the honor of the Blessed Virgin at

least by my official approbation. This gives me an opportunity of returning thanks for all she has done for us at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. . . .

I forgot to give you Monseigneur's compliments. He is devoted to you and has told some of the Bishops in my presence that if good is done in his diocese it is due in great part to the Sisters of Providence. . . . I like to turn my thoughts towards the Sisters at Saint Mary's whom whatever I do I cannot forget even for a moment. I love to represent them to myself praying to the Blessed Virgin, our good Mother, and their special protectress, with so much fervor and simplicity. Here, too, we pray to Mary.¹⁶

Another letter from the Council reveals that considerable tact and prudence had begun to be necessary on Mother Theodore's part to maintain an equilibrium between Father Corbe as Ecclesiastical Superior, who was inclined to greater strictness than even she felt necessary, and Bishop de Saint-Palais, so kind and fatherly. Father Corbe is "a little displeased with me now," she wrote to France. "He writes to me from Baltimore, where he went with His Lordship, that by misplaced requests I can obtain from the Bishop permissions which as superior he could not approve,"¹⁷ a course which would lead to his resignation. He had perceived that his office, for which there is no provision in the Rule, had become under a Bishop like Monseigneur de Saint-Palais, something of a sinecure. He retained it nevertheless till his death twenty-three years later though it lapsed then and has never been revived. The high regard in which Mother Theodore held this estimable priest is proved by a passage from another letter a few years later. "Our dear Father Corbe happily we still have. He continues to be our superior, something very fortunate for our Community. He is so prudent that he has gained the esteem of his brother priests and the confidence of all the Sisters, no one being able to say that he cares more for one than for another. The Sisters love him like a father."¹⁸

During Father Corbe's absence in Baltimore, Bishop de Saint-Palais had appointed as temporary chaplain a young French priest just ordained, a Breton who had met Bishop de la Hailandière in Rennes in 1844. He came to America, resumed his theological studies at Vincennes, and was retained by Bishop de Saint-Palais after the closing of the seminary and ordained the following April. He arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in the Bishop's company and remained till the end of May, when a letter from the Bishop from Madison directed him to Ferdinand, his new mission. "We greatly regret the departure of this excellent young priest so filled with the spirit of his state," wrote Mother Theodore, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier told her family of their pleasure in meeting one who had known them in France, "Abbé Contin of Chateauneuf," schoolmate of her brother Paul. Textbooks were so urgent a need during the first years in Indiana that the Le Fer family had sent practically all that the household contained. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had therefore in her possession in Indiana the very Latin grammar which she had used to teach her brothers at home in Saint Servan.

¹⁶ A Mother Theodore, 8 mai, 1849. S.M.W.A.

¹⁷ A Mère Saint-Charles, 1 juin, 1849. S.M.W.A.

¹⁸ 5 janvier, 1853.

Abbé Contin is very learned, she wrote, and I have brushed up my Latin with him from an old grammar, the leaves of which my *lupus*¹⁹ had almost devoured. From time to time I stopped to recall the past, especially at *me pœnitet, me pudet*, the terrible lesson for poor Paul. Shall I confess to you something which gave me great pleasure? To understand it fully, one must have spent eight years among these grave Americans. Well, the pleasure was to hear Abbé Contin scramble down the stairs as my brother used to do. I also reviewed algebra and geometry with him. I can understand how very fatiguing plus and minus must be for young heads, but the Americans are better fitted than we are for such studies as their imagination is less lively.²⁰

Detained in the East after the close of the Council, Bishop de Saint-Palais and his theologian had a narrow escape from one of those tragic accidents which were the curse of the steamboat era in America. They had arranged to leave New York upon a large boat, the *Empire*, but reached the pier too late. The *Empire*, however, never arrived at its destination. Colliding with a small merchant vessel, it sank with hundreds of passengers on board. Although they returned the first of June, the Bishop's plans for his visitation of the diocese had not had time to materialize when the cholera epidemic, which had been menacing Indiana for months from the South, became a fatal reality.

The Asiatic cholera of 1849 in America exceeded in violence that of any previous year since 1832. All during 1848 free schools, slavery, and the imminence of the cholera disputed space in the Indiana newspapers, and in 1849 it competed with the excitement of the gold rush to California. Cholera is essentially a result of poor sanitation, but its causes and treatment were not then generally known. The Terre Haute papers printed fantastic preventives and remedies; common salt, calomel, and quinine, and a decoction of tobacco were early recommendations, then later with better results, fresh air, good food, cleanliness, and avoidance of fatigue. The Catholic practice of eating fish on Friday was thought to be conducive to the disease, and Bishop Hughes of New York was said to have suspended this law during the summer of 1849. The epidemic was known to be raging for months in Russia and Turkey and was advancing westward on the same route as in 1832. As early as December, 1848, the western newspapers were warning their readers that the scourge had reached Staten Island, and in January, 1849, as has been noted, the influx of terrorized refugees from infected New Orleans, where one hundred and fifty deaths were reported on Christmas Day, 1848, was crowding the Mississippi and Ohio river ports. Sanitary measures were ordered in Terre Haute with the penalty of a fine for violations, and steamboat captains were forbidden to land anyone suffering from cholera or any contagious disease with penalty of seizure of boat and master.

Owing to these precautions Terre Haute and the vicinity escaped and "upon the advice of an eminent physician" [Dr. Baty] the *distribution des prix* at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was held privately. The Sisters announced themselves as "relinquishing with regret the pleasure they had promised themselves of publicly rewarding the preeminence which many

¹⁹ Her younger brother Paul.

²⁰ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 323.

of their pupils have so successfully attained in their various studies.”²¹ They also adverted to the excellent health of the students, a record which was maintained in Terre Haute also all during that fatal summer.

Such was far from being the case however elsewhere in Indiana. The story of Fort Wayne has been told, and in Madison the daughters of Mother Theodore were privileged to give another proof of their devotedness to the cause of charity. In the previous January, Vicksburg and Cincinnati had been attacked, and in February, Mother Theodore described the progress of the plague to Bishop Bouvier:

The cholera is making terrible ravages in New Orleans . . . as many as one hundred and twenty-five persons have died there in a single day. As the weather becomes colder the disease diminishes only to break out again with redoubled violence when it grows warmer. The towns which surround us are already attacked by the plague, Saint Louis, Cincinnati, Louisville, etc. I do not think it is in Indiana yet, but all are in extreme fear of it. They are convinced that in the spring it will come to those low places near the rivers which have been under water almost all winter.²²

The Wabash had overflowed three times during the winter in floods higher than at any time within the memory of man. The Mississippi and the Illinois Rivers too had been at flood height, and the weather all over the Western country had been humid and severe. Spring was now returning to southern Indiana with unusual beauty. The hills were covered with verdure, and the birds had found their songs again, but the balmy warm winds were freighted with death. In February the first cases of cholera were recorded in Madison. The first onset of the disease was brief but very severe. Eight persons died in two days, two of them parishioners of Saint Michael's Church. A third died a week later. Bishop de Saint-Palais had announced in the papers that the Sisters would care for the plague-stricken in Vincennes if any cases occurred, and they were volunteering generously for this dangerous work. “Our intention is to devote ourselves in the same manner in all the towns of our state where we have establishments,” wrote the Foundress.²³

She was nevertheless very anxious about her daughters in Madison, and she wrote to them at once one of her incomparably loving letters giving detailed directions regarding their daily routine, directions motivated by her own knowledge of nursing and her motherly solicitude. Without adverting to some of the current preventives which were of doubtful value at best, she counseled extreme cleanliness in their house and their persons, and although it was Lent and its prescriptions were strictly observed at the time, she forbade the Sisters to fast and ordered “wholesome food well cooked.” Passing with a wisdom rare in those days to the psychological aspects of their situation, she continued:

Be cheerful and amiable towards one another; have nothing on your conscience to cause you uneasiness. . . . Finally, my dear daughters, pray; prepare yourselves or rather, keep yourselves in readiness to respond to the Divine Spouse if He calls you to Himself, which I hope will not be yet a little while. . . . We are going to have public prayers for you. I entreat you also to pray as much as your occu-

²¹ *The Wabash Courier*, July 28, 1849.

²² 2 février, 1849. S.M.W.A.

²³ *Ibid.*

pations permit. Every day say the following prayer revealed to a priest in Rome under similar circumstances: "O Jesus, Divine Redeemer," etc., the prayer that is said every evening at Ruillé after the night prayers and which you know, Sister Basilide, Sister Joachim also.²⁴ Then if the plague makes great ravages in your city . . . you must be courageous and devote yourselves generously to the stricken people without distinction of persons. Do good to all for the love of God, and if you must die, well, my dear Sisters, try to die for the love of Him Who died for you. I do not feel at all that our dear Lord will require this great and painful sacrifice of me—of taking anyone of you—because He knows that I cannot spare you now. Oh, no, my God, You will not take these dear children now since they devote themselves with such courageous love to the care of the cholera victims. Adieu, my very dear children, rather, *à bientôt!* Whatever Our Lord pleases! Pray and endure—heaven is the reward.²⁵

Despite these noble counsels of self-sacrifice, the Foundress was very anxious. "I cannot tell you how uneasy I am about you," she wrote, and she besought Sister Basilide to write at least three times a week giving full details as to their own health, and the progress of the scourge. There were only four Sisters in Madison in the spring of 1849, Sister Basilide, Sister Mary Celestia or Celeste, as she was generally called, Sister Joachim, and Sister Félicité. All but the last named have already appeared in these pages, and all devoted themselves with exemplary zeal to the cholera sufferers both in their homes and in the convent which was turned into a relief station to dispense supplies for the sick. The Catholics flocked to the sacraments, the cholera proving, as the pastor Father DuPontavice said, a much better preacher than he had been.

The first onset in February died away quickly, but a return of the malady all along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers early in June exacted a terrible toll. Fifty persons were attacked among Saint Michael's people in Madison, and thirteen died in two weeks. The Sisters again gave generously of their care. "Those whom they could not save from death they prepared for this redoubtable passage."²⁶ Father DuPontavice was up every night giving the last rites to the dying, many of whom among the recently arrived immigrants, "twenty and thirty years of age, had never made their First Communion and must be prepared in a few minutes to appear before God."²⁷ Bishop de Saint-Palais sent Father DuPontavice much needed help in the person of young Father Contin who was delighted to assist in the work and inaugurate his ministry with so consoling a service of zeal. Eventually until the cessation of the epidemic in August, forty-eight adults perished. Fear of the scourge was widespread, and at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods terrified parents were coming daily to take away their children. In Madison the Irish suffered much, but not more than the Ger-

²⁴ This prayer, revealed to a saintly Passionist, Father Paul Francis Bartholomew of the monastery of Saints John and Paul in Rome, is still a part of the evening prayers of the Sisters of Providence. It runs as follows:

O Jesus, divine Redeemer, be merciful to us and to all mankind. Holy God, holy and strong God, holy and immortal God, have mercy on us and on all mankind.

Be propitious, be merciful, O my Saviour; from present dangers save us by Thy precious blood. Eternal Father, grant us mercy through the precious blood of Thy only Son, Jesus Christ, grant us mercy, we beseech Thee.

²⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 280.

²⁶ Mother Theodore à Mère Saint-Charles, 7 novembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

²⁷ DuPontavice Collection, 21 juin, 1849. N.D.U.A.

mans, "even less in proportion." Father DuPontavice summarized the losses to Catholic Indiana:

Washington has suffered terribly. Seventy-four persons there died of the scourge. The people were so terrified that they fled in all directions. The Bishop sheltered more than twenty in the vacant College of Saint Gabriel. . . . Lafayette has suffered greatly. . . . Blue Creek, Oldenburg, New Alsace, caught the disease from Cincinnati and lost many. . . . Vincennes had only a single case. In general, Catholic Indiana has not suffered greatly, and no priest died. God be praised! In Cincinnati and Saint Louis, however, the Catholic population has been more than decimated.²⁸

During the interval before the return of the cholera, despite the rumors of an imminent recurrence of the disease, Mother Theodore had set out in April for her usual tour of the establishments accompanied by Sister Mary Cecilia. They went to Madison first, where she found the Sisters in excellent health and high courage prepared for a second appearance of the cholera at any moment. With an interval of only a week after her return to Saint Mary's, the Foundress started for Fort Wayne and visited later successively Vincennes and Terre Haute, examining everywhere and conferring rewards in her usual gracious and charming manner. "The children at Fort Wayne wept when I left them," she wrote to France. "I too felt like crying." The little Indian children in particular touched her mother's heart. "All are Catholics, the majority having received Baptism at our school. You should see how interesting they are . . . I love them very much. . . . These poor children no longer have their parents. All are dead. I longed to be a mother to them."²⁹ Everywhere the pupils in the schools were increasing in numbers, and everywhere the Sisters were reaching out with admirable zeal to the little ones and to their parents to draw the children into their classes. Fort Wayne and Madison, where the Foundress discerned a vast field for doing good, would each need an additional Sister for the coming year.

The Protestants too are losing their prejudice in all our schools, their parents also. Wherever we go, they come to visit us, to converse with us, and are proud to have us in their houses where they serve us Friday fare on days of abstinence and stand silently while we say grace. If others malign us, we have advocates in our little girls who defend us even in the presence of their ministers.³⁰

The Bishop's intention had been to complete his visitation of the diocese before Christmas and leave for France in the spring of 1850. Circumstances, however, combined to delay him for many months. A year later the visitation was not yet finished. Ice on the rivers kept him over-time in Madison and Indianapolis and delayed his departure for the consecration of the new Jesuit Bishop of Chicago, Most Reverend Oliver Van de Velde, on February 11, 1849. The prevalent cholera and his journey East for the Baltimore Council had also delayed him, and although announced for Pentecost, it was not till the end of July that he surprised Father Kundek at Jasper, not too soon, however, to defraud the good priest of an opportunity for the Slavonic display which he loved. The Knights of Father Kundek in full panoply deployed upon the green amid volleys of musketry and the pealing of the church bell. A mounted cavalcade

²⁸ DuPontavice Collection, 19 septembre, 1849. N.D.U.A.

²⁹ A Mère Marie, 24-31 mai, 1849. S.M.W.A.

³⁰ A Mère Saint-Charles, 1 juin, 1849. S.M.W.A.

met the Bishop en route, and outside the town a procession of children followed by the Sisters, the pastor, and a concourse of silent and devout parishioners. The Jasper school with three Sisters now counted over a hundred pupils, nearly all Germans, and was accomplishing much good in the parish. The Bishop confirmed and preached next morning and spent the entire day among the people charming and delighting them by his gracious and attractive manners. His beautiful voice rang out in the church services, and his majesty and grace in all the ceremonies were noted everywhere by the beholders.

The clergy too learned at close range the nobility of heart and elevation of thought and sentiment and especially the benevolence and generosity of their new Bishop. "The truth regarding him is that there is nothing false or small about him," wrote Father DuPontavice to France.³¹ Later he was more generous, "He is always the same. I have never seen any change in him. His happiness is to accomplish all the good in his power. He neglects nothing to succeed in this. That is what I call being good, and that is what he is."³² "One is never dull in his company," wrote Father Benoit to Mother Theodore, and much later, "Such administrators of dioceses are few and far between. He is not a bookworm, he is not an ascetic, but he has read the book of human life, and he has been gifted with such unerring judgment that he is in reality the man for the place. May God grant him time to make use of his rare gifts."³³ The consensus of opinion in Vincennes in his day was that the prince of the Bishops was Monseigneur de Saint-Palais who was idolized by the people. He visited them all the time! He had all the good qualities of his predecessors.³⁴

The Bishop's zeal and endurance were still phenomenal, as they had been since his first coming to Indiana, thus proving the dictum of the old woodsman quoted by Parkman that "a gentleman of the right sort will stand hardship better than anyone."³⁵ The day after his visit to Jasper he began a thorough visitation of the adjacent missions of Troy and Fulda, and continued with unexampled energy to travel great distances and officiate daily at lengthy church services with no apparent sign of fatigue, conferring Baptism and Confirmation, and preaching as often as six times in a single day. Judge Elisha Mills Huntington from Terre Haute was now living at Mistletoe Lodge on a charming location above the river near Cannelton. At his invitation the Bishop spent the night with his family, who were Catholics, although the Judge entered the Church only some years later.

Next day he was en route again. At Madison the Bishop found the congregation of Catholics almost double the number of a year earlier, and Father DuPontavice had between two and three hundred persons for Confirmation. The Bishop met the Sisters as on all the missions with his usual fatherly kindness. The school now counted five Sisters and one hundred and thirty pupils, half of them Protestants. "Monseigneur has

³¹ DuPontavice Collection, 29 mars, 1849. N.D.U.A.

³² *Ibid.*, 2 avril, 1853. N.D.U.A.

³³ To Sister Euphrasie, December 29, 1875. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ Reminiscences of the family of Mr. Harry V. Somes, Sister Rose Xavier's father.

³⁵ *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West* (Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1918), p. 184.

already given Confirmation to more than eleven hundred persons," wrote Mother Theodore in November, 1849, "and he has not yet seen one-third of the state. This number includes many converted Protestants."³⁶ During the winter the visitation continued in the northern part of the diocese where one hundred and twenty pupils, twelve of them boarders, under five Sisters, greeted the Bishop at Fort Wayne. Later, he met eighty at Terre Haute. In Vincennes in the school attached to the Cathedral one hundred pupils almost all Catholics, were now under the care of four Sisters.

The Bishop was now proving himself "one of the brightest ornaments of the Catholic episcopacy in America."³⁷ The visitation was pushed forward to completion with the utmost thoroughness. The Bishop visited personally every church in the state, no matter how small or remote. Never again could it be said as young Father William Doyle had remarked so disconsolately when he was transferred from Ferdinand to Richmond in 1849, "No Bishop has ever visited this place."³⁸ No hardship of poor transportation over dreadful roads could discourage the indefatigable young Bishop and when vehicles broke down he was perfectly able and willing to continue his journey on foot. This careful survey revealed the gratifying state of religion in the diocese, the number of Catholics increasing everywhere, new missions springing up, and established parishes growing in numbers. "Everything is going well in the diocese, and it is truly going forward in a very consoling manner," wrote Father DuPontavice to France. "Catholics and churches are multiplying enormously . . . I think that piety is maintained, if not augmented . . . Monseigneur will leave in the spring for Europe. He is full of zeal and good will, and since he has been Bishop he has visited every church without exception."³⁹

The Bishop had one valuable asset, his two educational orders, Father Sorin's priests and Brothers and the Sisters of Providence, but the urgent needs of the diocese, funds to build churches and care for the orphans, and priests, especially German priests to minister to the immigrants who were streaming into Indiana, had emerged at once as a result of the visitation and were more deeply evident every day. Bishop de la Hailandière had drawn upon the seminaries of Ireland and had received several clerics of Irish birth, notably the two brothers, Michael and John McDermott. Few of the non-German clergy however had the initiative of Father William Doyle, who, when appointed to the German parish at Ferdinand, plunged into the study of German with such energy that he could preach and hear confessions in a few months. The corollary therefore of the diocesan visitation was a personal trip to Europe to procure the priests and funds which were absolutely necessary if religion in Indiana was to meet the immediate and pressing need. His own seminary closed, the Bishop must expect for the present to look for recruits outside the diocese.

The urgent problem offered by the seminary had been solved in a manner diametrically opposed to Bishop Bazin's plans, but faced with a choice Bishop de Saint-Palais decided to devote the meager resources at

³⁶ A Mère Saint-Charles, 7 novembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

³⁷ Most Rev. J. F. Noll, *Diocese of Fort Wayne*, p. 60.

³⁸ To V. Rev. A. Martin, October 19, 1849. S.M.W.A.

³⁹ DuPontavice Collection, 20 mai, 1850. N.D.U.A.

his command to the most forsaken and helpless portion of his flock. The Bishop's benevolent heart had early been touched by the plight of these unfortunate children. The devastating fevers of the Indiana summers and the prevalent pneumonia of winter consequent upon the hardships and exposure of frontier life, the hazards of the canal with sometimes several thousand men at work, and the large families usual at the time, made the number of orphans considerable even in normal times. The loss of the breadwinner could reduce an entire family to destitution over night. The cholera epidemic of 1849 aggravated sharply an already permanent situation. Only to friendly neighbors could such children look for a home and that often at the risk of loss of faith. Indiana Catholics were still in general poor, and the problem of supporting and educating a group of destitute children, which almost at once numbered seventy, was a formidable undertaking. The generous Bishop, however, never hesitated a minute. "God bless me,"⁴⁰ he was often heard to say, "these little ones must never suffer want or neglect," and no amount of criticism could alter his determination.

The Bishop's plans included from the first both girls and boys, but he at first offered only the former to Mother Theodore's care. The orphan boys, almost equally numerous and not less needy, he hoped to confide to Father Sorin's Community. One of the earliest projects to materialize at Notre Dame had been an orphanage and a trade school. "Monseigneur intends to confide the little boys to Father Sorin's Brothers, who will teach them to work and instruct them in trades," wrote Mother Theodore to Bishop Bouvier.⁴¹ No extensive preparations would be necessary for the little girls. The roomy convent school at Second and Church Streets in Vincennes could house them, and they could frequent the *école gratuite*.

Everywhere he had gone on his visitation the Bishop had appealed for assistance for the orphans, and on August 29, 1849, the asylum opened with three children, little Maggie Dill, a protégé of Bishop Bazin's, the first to enter. Sister Mary Margaret, who had been stationed at the school while it was still in charge of the Sisters of Charity, was to be superior assisted by Sister Michel, Père Michel's youngest daughter, and Mother Theodore gave them to be trained three vigorous young Sisters aflame with zeal for this noble work of teaching the neglected children of Indiana to know and love God, Sister Maria, who had come from France with Bishop de la Hailandière in 1845, Sister Clara, and Sister Helena. The number of children increased rapidly. In November, Mother Theodore was writing to France,

We have a large number now of poor little orphan girls at Vincennes for whom there is no resource save the Providence of God Who feeds the birds and causes the grass to grow. Are they not dear to His Heart? . . . Our good Bishop is now making the visitation of his diocese, and he himself solicits charity for his little girls. There are five still here with us, but we will keep them as they will not be received at the asylum after the age of ten, and ours are older than that.⁴²

Although the Bishop had sent out a circular earlier appealing for prayers for the Holy Father then in exile at Gaeta, his first pastoral letter

⁴⁰ A favorite expression.

⁴¹ 7 novembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

⁴² *Ibid.*

issued at the end of October, was to recommend the orphans to the charity of the priests and people of the diocese:

On being charged with the administration of our extensive diocese . . . the first object which attracted our attention and enlisted our sympathy was the destitution of our poor orphans. That dearest portion of our flock left without shelter and protection was exposed, if not to want, at least to the loss of the true faith, the sole and most precious inheritance bequeathed to them by their destitute parents.

For many years the want of an asylum wherein we could gather these treasures of the Church has been felt in this state. But the absence of means to support it has so far prevented so desirable an undertaking. An awful visitation has during the past summer added many to the number already so great of our orphans. . . . Feeling that all such are our children and have a special claim to our paternal care and affection because unfortunate and poor, we concluded to combat . . . and endeavor to overcome all difficulties thrown in our path. An asylum for girls has already been opened in Vincennes, where we have a house well adapted to that purpose under the special and fostering care of the Sisters of Providence; and in a very short time provision will be made to receive boys in the college buildings of the same town, or in some more convenient place of our diocese.⁴³

Then this distinguished prelate and nobleman, who had shown himself on the poor missions of Daviess County so ingenious in inaugurating ways and means to raise money to build churches, now asked the pastors to install an orphans' box in every church and station and to take up a collection in person on Christmas day for them in the parish church and on the following Sunday in the mission churches. Although the Sisters' services were gratis, the Bishop was assuming as he well knew, a heavy and ever recurrent financial burden. The amount realized throughout the diocese, always insufficient for the orphans' support, had to be augmented yearly in Vincennes by various charitable functions by which the people of his episcopal city generously came to the Bishop's assistance.

You must know, commented Father DuPontavice in January, 1850, that Monseigneur de Saint-Palais has converted your seminary into an orphan asylum. That was one of my counsels. . . . Since the seminary had been destroyed by uniting it with the college, I thought nothing better could be done than to offer it as a refuge to the poor children that misfortune has left without a support on earth. If His Lordship would follow another counsel I gave him, the college, which is as dead as the seminary, would soon be an asylum for the orphan boys. A collection was made all through the diocese for this purpose. I think it will succeed.⁴⁴

The orphan girls were now provided for, but the care of the boys offered difficulties from the beginning. Mother Theodore was averse to assuming charge of them, as the French Rule expressly stated that the vocation of the Sisters was to the education of girls. What blessing could they expect from God if they ventured beyond the wise limits traced for them in their Rule? The question of teaching boys was already appearing as the major problem which it afterward became. What Mother Theodore called "the republican education which is given the children," manifested in the boys effects not so perceptible in the girls, and from this period on the discipline and instruction of groups of boys required all the tact of the most gifted Sisters. This fact reinforced Mother Theodore's

⁴³ Alerding, *History of Vincennes Diocese*, pp. 195-196.

⁴⁴ DuPontavice Collection, 18 janvier, 1850. N.D.U.A.

reluctance to assume charge of the boys' orphan asylum. "I fear very much that we shall not succeed in bringing up little boys," she wrote to Bishop Bouvier. Father Sorin's Community, decimated by the cholera, was unable to accept the charge, and the Bishop condescending to Mother Theodore's wishes, placed the orphan boys in September, 1850, under the care of an experienced Catholic man, a matron, and several assistants. In the following April he was compelled however to recur to Mother Theodore again, and she gave him at once three Sisters, Sister Joachim at their head, to minister to the little boys, over thirty in number, housed in the spacious old Saint Gabriel's College building, now to be called Saint Vincent's Orphan Asylum. The girls now numbered forty-seven with six Sisters to care for them.

Both asylums remained to the end of his life a major preoccupation of Bishop de Saint-Palais. He loved the children as His Divine Master had done before him, and this fatherly care, seconded to the end of Mother Theodore's life by the same superiors, Sister Joachim and Sister Mary Margaret, left nothing undone for the present and future welfare of the children. All these years and long afterward the little girls, clad in pink with little pink sunbonnets, were a familiar and pathetic sight on Sunday morning on the streets of Vincennes walking demurely to High Mass at the Cathedral, where they occupied the three high steps which Bishop de la Hailandière had placed to the sanctuary when he excavated the crypt chapel beneath it for Bishop Bruté's remains in 1841.

The question of accepting the boys' asylum had been further complicated by the urgent appeals addressed to Mother Theodore about the same time by the Reverend Hippolyte DuPontavice to take over his boys' school at Madison, a dream of which he said, "if before I die and close my eyes until the day of the general resurrection I can see . . . I will be happy and will have hope for the fidelity of the future generations of our dear Indiana." His expectations were high. "In a few years I shall have little *gentlemen* as pious as my little *ladies*. Pray then and ask prayers that . . . not only mine but all in our diocese may be conducted in the paths of religion and piety by the Sisters of Providence."⁴⁵ Mother Theodore surrendered to his pleadings insofar as to promise to consult the Sisters. During her visits to the missions she did so, only to find a very positive and general reluctance in the Community to taking the Madison boys' school. Sister Saint Francis Xavier, whose predilection for boys dated from the old days at Saint Servan, was commissioned to communicate this momentous decision: "My conviction is that we should not accept the boys," she wrote, "I who so much love these poor children." "What," he answered, "my desires, my hopes of seven years which I thought crowned with success at last disappointed! I am not ashamed to acknowledge it, my eyes are wet with tears. Their house was prepared. . . . Yesterday I was happy."⁴⁶ Truly the ways of a superior general in Indiana even in days of prosperity and peace were often hard.

During the summer of 1849 when the Community had been bending every energy to assist the Bishop in the rescue and care of the orphans, life was flowing on otherwise with an even tenor at Saint Mary-of-the-

⁴⁵ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 265.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

Woods. Early in August the Madison Sisters, worn out from their long vigil near the sick and dying, arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Sister Celestia had fallen ill and had preceded them by several weeks. All were in urgent need of rest and care, and it was lavished upon them by their generous Mother. In all, her predictions had been realized, "I have confidence that our good God will not permit anyone of you to be attacked by the scourge," and "I do not anticipate [severe ravages of the cholera in Madison] for the inhabitants are sober and industrious. At New Orleans the contagion attacked only those who were predisposed by a weakened constitution or by excesses."⁴⁷ All her skill and devotion were required however all summer in caring for the Community. A light species of cholera, called cholerine, attacked a number of Sisters, who already prostrated by the excessive heat and humidity were hardly able to throw it off. Rest and good nursing however gradually improved the general health.

As the time of the retreat of 1849 drew near, Mother Theodore besought Bishop de Saint-Palais to do her Community the honor of conducting it. He excused himself, however, directing her to apply to the Jesuits. Members of the order from France, who had been established at Saint Mary's College near Lebanon, Marion County, Kentucky, since 1831, had left there in 1846 to take over Saint John's, afterwards Fordham College in New York at Bishop Hughes's request,⁴⁸ to be succeeded at Saint Mary's College by the Reverend Julien Delaune, erstwhile pastor of Saint Michael's Church at Madison, assisted by several Brothers from Notre Dame du Lac, as we have seen. In 1848 the Jesuits of the Missouri Province had assumed the direction of Saint Joseph's College at Bardstown, Kentucky,⁴⁹ and the retreats at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, hitherto given by the generous missionaries of the diocese, after 1849 were preached exclusively by the Jesuits.

The first of this long list which includes many names famous in the history of the order in the Middle West was Father Francis Xavier di Maria, at that time pastor of Saint Joseph's Church, formerly Bishop Flaget's Cathedral, at Bardstown. He had come to America in 1841, had been professor of theology at Saint Louis University, and was now filling a similar position at Saint Joseph's College, Bardstown, in addition to his pastoral duties. This learned and eloquent man had also an excellent command of English. His coming was specially welcome as it added another link to the chain forged in 1841 when Father Louis Petit, S.J., visited Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and offered wise counsel and encouragement to the "little flock" of Providence. Father di Maria reached Saint Mary's on August 6, and the retreat opened on the evening of the eighth. At its close on the feast of the Assumption, the beloved Bishop of Vincennes officiated for the first time at a ceremony of profession and reception in the convent chapel and administered Confirmation to five postulants. "Monseigneur gave Confirmation in our chapel wearing the mitre. It was the first time [during his episcopate] that we had witnessed this ceremony," wrote Mother Theodore in the diary.

Three Sisters were professed, and eight received the religious habit,

⁴⁷ A Sister Basilide, 2 mars, 1849. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁸ Garraghan, *The Jesuits of the Middle United States*, vol. 3, p. 260.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

among the latter Sister Clara (Joanna Kiefer) a young German novice, Sister Helena, (Bridget Burns) who was born in Ireland, both of whom were sent at once to the newly opened orphan asylum in Vincennes, and Sister Felicité (Margaret Melchior) who had entered from Jasper in 1847 and whom we have already met in the history of Saint Augustine's, Fort Wayne, where she spent many years in charge of converts edifying everyone she met by her virtues. Still another of this band was one of the most gifted of the early American Sisters, Madeleine Schnell, later known and loved for fifty-five years at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as Sister Maurice. Born at Inspach, Baden, "where the Moselle enters the Rhine" as she loved to recall, she entered the novitiate in 1847. Her youth and her talents prompted the Bishop to advise Mother Theodore to enroll her among the academy pupils to finish her education, after which she spent the remainder of her life among the teachers there. Her phenomenal skill with pen, brush, and pencil was directed by a highly intelligent mind and scientific taste and ability of unusual scope. The beautiful symbolic pictures and the mottoes she painted for the walls of convent and academy still, after many years, keep her memory alive.

The retreat had been of immense spiritual benefit, and Father di Maria's counsels given so generously were hardly less highly prized. Noting her preoccupation with the orphans and the poor, he called Mother Theodore's attention to another class, more exposed and also more influential, the prosperous and the well-to-do, who were now becoming numerous in Indiana and who should share in the ministrations of the Community.⁵⁰ On the evening of the same day," recorded Mother Theodore, "Monseigneur and Father di Maria left for Terre Haute to take the stage for Vincennes next day." Bishop de Saint-Palais was for years very desirous of securing Jesuits for his diocese, a wish which found temporary realization in 1857 when they took charge for three years of Saint Joseph's Church, Terre Haute. The Bishop held the order in high esteem. Enlisting the services of religious orders was one means of supplying the deficit of priests in the diocese. Kentucky's spiritual wealth in religious foundations of both men and women continually excited the pious wonder of prelates and observers in other dioceses and stimulated their emulation. A possible establishment of a house of his order there was taking the Jesuit Father to the episcopal city. Eventually it was Father di Maria who became the first Jesuit pastor of Saint Joseph's Church, in Terre Haute eight years later.

⁵⁰ Mother Anastasie's Reminiscences.

CHAPTER XXVII

DEVELOPMENTS AT SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS IN THE BISHOP'S ABSENCE

"We were long without seeing the blessing of God on our work here in the woods, but it is no longer thus."

MOTHER THEODORE

THE year 1849 was drawing to a close. The autumn peace which still permeates the air of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at that season clings to the pages of a long letter which Mother Theodore wrote to France early in November. This blessed peace which from now on was her daily portion would never have been so highly prized but for the long and painful struggle which had preceded it. To Bishop Bouvier, their counselor and protector, the Sisters felt that under God they owed it almost entirely. He had never in their darkest hours forsaken them. This they never forgot. To him therefore letters went faithfully several times a year detailing the progress of the Community and in return came missives of continued encouragement and advice. To Mother Mary also Mother Theodore wrote without fail, although letters in reply continued to her great sorrow to be very few. Though now thoroughly devoted to their adopted country, the French Sisters were never to lose their deep-rooted affection for France and Ruillé, and their grief at being, as they felt, neglected and forgotten. "This is the greatest of my crosses," wrote the Foundress. This time she would have liked her good wishes to reach Ruillé on the fourth of November, Mother Saint Charles's name day, always a special occasion at the French motherhouse.

Pressing circumstances had, however, combined to delay her letter. The apples must be picked and a trip made to the woods for wild grapes for preserves. The potatoes, small this year and insufficient in quantity, must be dug and stored before the frost which was imminent now any night. Then afterwards the corn had to be gathered and shucked, the last operation before winter. The illness and death of the poor old Frenchwoman known as Grosse Marie, already described, occurred during these weeks. The Community also welcomed a brief visit from Monseigneur, who stopped over for a day on the feast of All Saints on his way to the northern Indiana missions. Mother Theodore, however, finally finished her long letter to Ruillé and noted it among half a dozen others in her record of "Active correspondence" on the margin of the diary on November 10.

On the twenty-eighth she was writing again. A major calamity had descended upon the Community. Again, too, as they felt she had so often done before in hours of stress and sorrow, the Queen of Heaven had come tangibly to their help. On Sunday, November 18, Sister Saint Francis Xavier was suddenly attacked by pleurisy, and almost immediately grew very ill. "You know that this poor child has only a breath of life, which appears always ready to leave her," wrote Mother Theodore. "For six

months I knew that she was becoming much weaker. When I saw her ill, I believed her already dead. I had hope only in God and in the protection of our good Mother in heaven."¹

By Friday the patient's condition had become alarming. She herself realized it. Friday night was terrible; her oppression increased to such a degree that she seemed suffocating. She grew delirious from the mounting fever, and her rapid and irregular pulse and bewildered look betrayed to the Sisters round her bed the appalling progress of the malady. She hovered thus between life and death all during that frightful night. No doctor was near them, for none could be induced to make the long trip across the river and over dreadful roads. "I never feel the pangs of poverty so greatly as when someone is ill, and we cannot call a doctor," wrote Mother Theodore. "The good God Himself is our physician and our cure."² The Community had now for a week been storming heaven by the continuous and fervent prayers which had saved them before in so many crises. But their Heavenly Patroness seemed deaf to their supplications.

The next day, Saturday, Mother Theodore came into the sick room at four in the morning. Silently she took the poor sufferer's hand burning with fever. She was conscious and rational, but her ebbing remnant of strength was almost gone. At five Father Corbe said the Mass of the Blessed Virgin for her, the Sisters receiving Holy Communion in groups each in honor of one of the mysteries of the Rosary. From her bed, which was quite near the chapel, she followed the various parts of the Mass, saying to herself that her name was in the memento of the living for the last time unless the Blessed Virgin would work a miracle to cure her. With her usual perfect abandonment to the Divine Will she neither asked nor desired it.

Then their Heavenly Mother acted. After Mass Mother Theodore came back to the patient's bedside. She had remembered that M. Léon Dupont, the Holy Man of Tours, the old friend of the sick Sister on her journey to Havre in 1841, had sent them some months earlier several small bottles of water of La Salette. "That is true," whispered Sister Saint Francis, and she added, "The water will cure me." Of this Mother Theodore had not the faintest doubt, but when the patient asked what sort of cure she wished, convinced that she would see the dying Sister restored to health and vigor before her very eyes, the superior's courage failed her, and she said, "A gradual one." As soon as the patient had swallowed the miraculous water, she felt and said that she was cured. She asked for something to eat and called for the Sisters who came to embrace her, their tears of sorrow turned to joy.

They needed all their faith, however, in the power and goodness of their Heavenly Patroness for Saturday afternoon was terrible for the patient. She was prostrated by such weakness that every breath seemed her last. The buzzing of an unfortunate fly which invaded the sick room actually made her tremble. A faint and constrained breathing, almost the only sign of life, continued through the afternoon though the small quan-

¹ A Mère Marie, 28 novembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

² *Ibid.*

tity of the miraculous water given her from time to time always revived her. At eight o'clock that evening she was able to speak, and it was to tell her good superior and Sisters not to doubt her cure. She was so exhausted, however, that they saw their prayers had not yet been answered. While Mother Theodore and Father Corbe oppressed with sorrow were standing at her bedside, she opened her eyes. Afterwards she wrote:

I asked for another spoonful of the dear water of La Salette, and told my superiors that, even should they see me *dead*, they should not be uneasy, but only sprinkle the miraculous water on me, and I would resuscitate. In spite of my protestations, when the water was in the spoon, Mother Theodore knelt and prayed to the Blessed Virgin with all her heart. I saw Father Corbe take off his biretta and do the same. As soon as I had taken the miraculous water, however, I felt reanimated, and a few minutes later on I was strong enough to leave my bed and take five or six steps, leaning on the arm of a Sister; but this precaution was for form's sake. Indeed I was stronger than I am even today.³

In fact she fell asleep at ten, and at six o'clock next morning Father Corbe brought her Holy Communion. He placed the ciborium, as she afterwards loved to recall, upon her little writing table adorned with lighted candles and blue and white artificial flowers. The Sisters who had accompanied the Blessed Sacrament with burning tapers knelt about the room, now fully convinced that their prayers were heard and weeping with joy and gratitude.

She was in fact cured. On November 27, Mother Theodore could write in the diary, "Our dear invalid continues to be better and always out of danger." On Saint Francis Xavier's day, December 3, she was able to sit up and even to spend a moment in the chapel. The day, as the Mistress's name day, was always a festive one in the novitiate. This year Mother Theodore was in charge.

On Saint Francis Xavier's day I delegated Mother Theodore to represent me among the novices, wrote the now convalescent patient to France, and she did things in grand style. First of all they went to sing hymns to "Our Lady of the Washhouse." Under this title our dear Sister-laundresses find much consolation in honoring a little statue of the Blessed Virgin sent to us by Monsieur Dupont. In her gratitude Mother Theodore joined her voice, which resembles mine, to the fresh voices of her daughters. Then she had a fine collation served, and I shall whisper to you, they even drank a little wine—something which does not happen every day.

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception I was strong enough to receive Holy Communion in our chapel. . . . I am now almost as well as before my illness. Pray to the Blessed Virgin that I may faithfully fulfill that for which she has prolonged my life.⁴

What Sister Saint Francis Xavier had by this time become to Mother Theodore and to the Community is revealed in a confidential letter written by the Foundress a few weeks later:

How you will thank our Protectress, our Blessed Mother! In all the establishments where we have Sisters, the Holy Sacrifice has already been offered in thanksgiving for the favor that we have just obtained. Oh! but we promised to love and serve God with more fervor and fidelity than ever. He is so good. It is impossible for me to express to you, my dear friends, what has passed in our hearts, especially

³ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 283.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

what has passed in mine. The heart and soul have sorrows, anguish, and enjoyments that the pen cannot describe, that the tongue cannot express. Your hearts—yes, yours, will understand this. Sister Saint Francis Xavier is necessary for my existence. She is my eldest daughter, the friend of my soul, in which she reads as I do in hers. I have need of her advice, of her example, I will even say, of her little scoldings. I saw myself, by her death left, as it were, alone in the world, in the midst of a Community that I love and by which I am tenderly loved; all this is true, and is not half of what I should like to say.

Nevertheless, it was not for myself that I asked her of God, and of His tender Mother who is also ours, with so much earnestness; I asked her for my Sisters, for our dear novices, for our young Congregation which is called to do so much good in this country if God preserves it in His spirit. Who better than this dear Sister can inspire love for virtue by her words and example? The good God knew it well; it was to the interests of His glory to preserve for us this treasure. Her death would have been a great calamity for our mission, an irreparable loss. I was so much the more disconsolate, as I felt I had drawn this misfortune upon us by my infidelities. I promised to become better; ask for me of Our Lord that I may be faithful to my promises, in order that He may preserve a long time this precious companion, and that He may be glorified in our House of the Forest.⁵

When all was over, their reactions were characteristic: Mother Theodore's restrained and practical, "You do not doubt that with all our hearts we are grateful to the good God and the Blessed Virgin. So many things we promised remain yet to be fulfilled. These will not be the easiest"; and Sister Saint Francis Xavier's, a loving hymn of praise, "O my God, how good and generous you are. How is it possible that we hesitate so long to give ourselves to you."⁶

Nowadays when the discipline of administering the sacraments to the seriously sick and to soldiers in time of war has been so generously modified by Papal authority, we look back with wonder to those days when this fragile Sister literally at death's door must fast from midnight till six o'clock to be able to receive Holy Communion! On the crucial Saturday when the Blessed Virgin was actually curing her "gradually" as Mother Theodore herself had specified, she "did not waken till midnight. I wanted her to take a little liquid, but she begged so earnestly to be allowed to receive Holy Communion with the Community in the morning [Sunday] that I could not refuse the request of such faith and love. In fact, she was able to receive at six o'clock."⁷ This rigidity so general at the time, was among the last traces of the fearful Jansenism of the seventeenth century, which the revelations of Saint Margaret Mary were sent upon earth to combat and cure. It long persisted among the most deeply religious French families as "rather too much constraint and severity," compensated for, however, by the "firmness of principle, the training of the conscience, and the habit of taking very much in earnest from the tenderest years all that touches the relations of the soul with God."⁸

Its effects are still found in the early training given to some of the religious leaders even of the present century. That many of the pioneer

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 284-285.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁷ A Mère Marie, 28 novembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

⁸ Raymund Thibaut, O.S.B., *Abbot Columba Marmion*, Tr. by Mother Mary of St. Thomas (Herder, St. Louis, 1932), p. 8.

French and Flemish clergy in America bore this definite tinge of Jansenist religious and moral rigor we have seen in Kentucky and in the Bailly family in Mother Cecilia's youth. The famous Jansenistic form of the crucifix with arms raised almost straight above the head to symbolize the small number of the saved⁹ may still be chanced upon now and then in America in old carved crucifixes, and this form was so common in France that it appeared inadvertently in some of the white crosses worn by the early Sisters of Providence in America. Father John Guéguen, at this time pastor of Indianapolis, and later for fourteen years (1879-1893) chaplain to the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, quickly discovered on his first visit to say Mass at the Bailly homestead in 1840 that there were some Jansenists among those who were present. Father Guéguen was not surprised:

There were so many Jansenists among the Catholics of the missionary regions of America, he records, that it was a delicate matter to deal with. We missionaries of that day had very strict orders about them, not to drive them out of the Church if they wished to be Catholics and not to try to bring them in if they wished to stay out. There were so many of them, and good people too.¹⁰

After the distressing days of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's illness and the general rejoicing and thanksgiving upon her cure, life at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods while the beloved patient was convalescing, lapsed again into its usual routine. Before Christmas Mother Theodore accompanied by Father Corbe devoted the greater part of two cold snowy days to examining the academy pupils. Their progress merited an encomium unusual with her, "The pupils have in general progressed surprisingly, and their conduct is very satisfactory."¹¹ Sister Mary Cecilia's health was still poor, her sufferings rendering her, as Mother Theodore remarked,

distant and melancholy. I love her very tenderly, however, she added. She is no longer that self-possessed and capable person, mistress of every situation, but is disconcerted and worried at the least untoward circumstance. When another pupil comes and she has no bed, she is excessively perturbed. There is no reason for uneasiness. We send her our bed, and we sleep on the floor for a few nights.¹²

That Sister Cecilia could not view with equanimity the spectacle of the superior general in her delicate health sleeping on the floor in order to give her bed to a child is however hardly surprising.

The winter continued very severe, and on some days the stage could not get through the deep snow on the old North Arm road past Saint Mary's. The temperature fell so low on Christmas Eve that Father Corbe decided to celebrate Midnight Mass in the convent chapel, and the few villagers who ventured forth were accommodated there. During January the biting cold continued, but in February Mother Theodore accompanied Sister Angelina, whose failing health was a source of acute anxiety, to consult Dr. Baty at Vincennes. He prescribed, but it was evident that he could do very little for her. Mother Theodore realized that it was now only a question of time till the Community would lose this devoted and valuable Sister. She stood the trip fairly well, however, but the exposure of the long

⁹ *Le Christ aux bras étroits.*

¹⁰ Frances Howe, *Story of a French Homestead in the Old Northwest*, p. 139.

¹¹ Community Diary.

¹² A Mère Marie, 7 novembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

hours in the icy stage brought on another of Mother Theodore's attacks of pneumonia. As a precaution on arriving in Terre Haute, she had left Sister Angelina with the Sisters at Saint Vincent's for the night but had driven at once herself across the river and over the muddy roads to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The Forty Hours Devotion was in progress as usual during the Carnival days before Lent. The Foundress was taken ill almost immediately but kept up her correspondence and her direction of activities on the farm from her sick bed for some ten days. The five baby calves at the barn were doing well, but three tiny lambs had died from negligence in caring for them. Trees were planted, and some sowing done in a few days of splendid weather at the end of February. At the beginning of March, Mother Theodore had to abandon all attempts at performing any of her duties as she had grown much worse. On the seventh of the month, however, she was able to receive Holy Communion. On the Friday before Passion Sunday Father Corbe said Mass for her cure, and the Sisters communicated in honor of the Precious Blood. A week later she could feel that she was really better, and with characteristic energy started at once upon her spring tour.

The general persuasion that radical and permanent changes of climate in middle age are often deleterious seems verified in Mother Theodore. In view of her poor health from this time on, the Community began to take measures to husband her waning strength and in particular to ward off the sharp attacks of pneumonia which had brought her to death's door almost every year since the foundation. Long bouts of travel under a thousand hardships in the freezing stages and canal boats were in general definitely taboo during the winter and early spring. Father Corbe as Ecclesiastical Superior could exert his authority here. Not even when Sister Marie Joseph was dying in Fort Wayne was the Foundress permitted to make the long trip north. Her zeal and energy, however, knew no truce except when she was totally incapacitated and confined to her bed, and many winter trips on business to Vincennes and elsewhere during these days are recorded in the diary. In 1849 she was giving herself at the most four years of life. In reality she was to have seven years more of fruitful activity. Her digestion was now so weak that she practically lived upon a light gruel called *bouillie* or pap made of flour and milk, with now and then some squirrel broth when Father Corbe spent an afternoon ranging the woods with his gun. The unfortunate use of leeches and bleeding was very injurious in the wasting fevers and pulmonary disorders from which she suffered. She was, however, an adept at the lancet which, with quinine and calomel, was the cure-all of some of the medical practitioners of the day, and she often used it upon herself.

In March, 1850, the visitation and examination of the school at Saint Vincent's Academy in Terre Haute which was first that year upon Mother Theodore's itinerary, was soon completed. On Holy Thursday the Foundress reached Vincennes where she spent the remainder of Holy Week. Finding all the "classes well kept and the Sisters in good health," she moved on during Easter week to Jasper. Here only eight American children were registered among a large group of German boys and girls. The disciple of the boys was proving a problem, but Mother Theodore con-

tinued to note satisfactory progress everywhere. En route to Madison by a detour, she spent a day in Louisville to purchase school supplies and two pianos for the growing music classes of Fort Wayne and Madison. In the latter city Sister Basilide's two large schools of some one hundred and fifty pupils were requiring an additional building owing to the proposed separation of Irish and German children.

Hurrying home after a month's absence the Foundress enjoyed the comparative facility of the Madison railroad to Indianapolis. Here, however, she was compelled to wait for a place in the stage an entire day which she spent as a guest of the Drake family. The trip to Terre Haute was made over a terrible road in a "mud wagon," where Mother Theodore and the two postulants who accompanied her could hardly sit up among enormous boxes of books and mail bags. Along this way was a locality familiarly called "the devil's half acre," where passengers often got out of the stage to flounder through the mud or to assist in extricating the stranded vehicle with fence rails. By a sort of miracle the travelers arrived at Terre Haute on April 26 though half dead.

Never in my life have I seen or even imagined such roads as those from the capital to Terre Haute . . . we were so bruised, so ill, so tired from our twenty-four hours in that crowded mud wagon, wrote Mother Theodore to Sister Basilide, truly like *poules mouillées*. . . . I had nose bleed all along the way. At last on Friday we arrived with all our members intact, and here we are still living and I getting ready to be jounced again for I intend leaving for Lafayette and so on next Monday."¹³

The road across the river bottom to Terre Haute had been greatly improved within the past few years, bridges erected over the sloughs, and the road itself graded and raised some six feet in the vain hope of defying the restless river. The pork packing industry of Terre Haute, now at its last peak before its destruction by the railroads, was interested in smoothing the way for the droves of pigs which reached the city from the Illinois farms across the Wabash. Long trains of emigrant wagons bound for Iowa or Wisconsin also crossed daily. But an elevation of six feet meant very little when the river on one of its periodic freshets rose in a few days to eighteen feet above low water mark, and the familiar item appeared in Mother Theodore's diary, "The bottom is full of water."

After a week of wet and cold weather inauspicious for any work on the farm, the Foundress left with Sister Olympiade on May 6 for a three-weeks trip to Fort Wayne. The *Wabash-Courier* was advertising the river, owing to recent rains, in fine boating condition, and steamboats rushing to and from the Terre Haute pier. Accidents had however been frequent of late, and with a sudden fall in the river the boats often ran aground. In a single year, 1851, 118 steamers were lost in the western waters and 695 lives. One-tenth of the steamboats were an annual loss.¹⁴ The *Daniël Boone*, a weekly packet running between Terre Haute and Evansville, "the fastest boat in the trade," upon which Mother Theodore had often traveled to Vincennes, got into too strong a current while on the way up the river and was forced over the bank into the woods near York, Illinois,

¹³ *J. and L.*, p. 294.

¹⁴ *Wabash Courier*, June 12, 1852.

where she remained high and dry, an almost total loss. Her passengers, a pleasure party from Lafayette, were taken off by the *Hibernia*. The next year the *Highlander* coming down the river struck a snag and sank in eight feet of water, and about the same time the *Vermont* on its trip up river went aground between Terre Haute and Vincennes, and the *Glaucus* was held fast at the rapids known as the Grand Chain, below Vincennes. These boats were all of the light draught type of steamer built especially for the Wabash and able to navigate in twenty inches of water or even less. Mother Theodore often traveled to Fort Wayne on the little *Pink*, which was running on the Wabash during these years.

The canal now in full operation from Terre Haute north to Lake Erie, was subject to its own hazards. It had been open only a few weeks when a large break occurred near the Basin on Ninth Street in Terre Haute¹⁵ when the entire bank and some hundred yards of the bottom of the canal were swept into the river. Farmers along the route cut the levees in the belief that the water in which uncut trees were standing caused malaria. The *John R. Porter*, a canal packet boat, a "splendid specimen of watercraft," the first of its kind to descend the canal to Terre Haute, was now available all the way to Fort Wayne, and after June, 1850, Samuel Doyle's line of canal passenger boats ran every other day to Lafayette connecting with a daily line to Toledo. "Fitted up and furnished in good style, with ventilated decks and commanded by gentlemanly captains," these boats were an immense improvement upon the earlier canal boats upon which Mrs. Trollope and Charles Dickens had traveled, or the dreadful line boat upon which Sister Saint Francis Xavier made the trip west in 1841. To Fort Wayne the Sisters paid \$6.75 per person, board included, the time about two days and nights. These boats were an advance, too, in that they purported to run on schedule and left Terre Haute at eight A.M., instead of at any time the cargo was aboard and the passenger list filled. In 1852 people were astonished at the railroad time tables and their comparative promptitude, accustomed as travelers were to the leisurely steamboats which often delayed a half day, or a day, or a day and a half after the hour appointed for departure.¹⁶ Not until very gradually however after the railroads came into general use, was there anything like present-day regularity in the service.

On all her voyages letters from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods kept the Foundress informed of the daily round of occurrences:

All your good children are well and eagerly await their Mother's return, wrote Father Corbe about this time. Yesterday there was a little commotion. Sister Monique's chimney caught fire. It was quickly extinguished, and while everyone was running to and fro, I was seated quietly on my sofa reading. I heard an outcry from the children, but as I often hear the amazing voices of these little witches, I paid no attention.

Another event, a roe buck arrived from Vincennes, and great was the difficulty to find a lodgment for it. The council of high dignitaries convened, and after lengthy deliberations assigned it to the shed near the stable. My colts are charming. I have been offered forty dollars for one of them. . . . I was forgetting *Taillard*

¹⁵ The present site of Hulman and Company's wholesale house.

¹⁶ *Wabash Courier*, June 12, 1852.

who seems dejected going about head and tail down. The poor beast misses you too.¹⁷

Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote often, and to her and to the Sisters on the missions the Foundress sent in reply affectionate and motherly words, often half French and half English as in the original of the following written to the Madison Sisters:

✠ J.M.Jos.

INDIANAPOLIS, Monday Evening.

On saying goodbye to you I found myself alone in the world. The steam, as though it perceived my feelings, was very slow. An hour and a half after you left I was still at Madison. I experienced an attraction which prevented me from leaving. Was it the same attraction which kept the cars from moving? As soon, however, as we got over the big hill we went like the wind over trees and rivers and reached Indianapolis sooner than usual. . . . I am taking five children with me to Saint Mary's. I am going to bed. I am going to Saint Mary's. What else? I am going to heaven where I shall meet you. My respects to your good chaplain. Always your Theodore. You will see that I am writing without seeing but not without loving you. Good night.¹⁸

What the delays and hardships of these pioneer journeys always were is gleaned from another letter written along the way before the Madison Railroad was finished, when travelers took the stage from Indianapolis to the point on the route which the rails had reached. Begun during the famous internal improvement furore of 1836, the road progressed only seventeen miles in three years. By 1841 it had covered the distance to Vernon, then to Queensville. With the panic of 1837 work had ceased, but eventually under a private company Columbus was reached and gradually Edinburg, and after eleven years in all, the capital. The *Wabash Courier* gives the schedule of the Madison trip in 1849. A locomotive and one car traveled at the rate of fifteen or twenty miles per hour. Leaving Madison in the morning, passengers reached Indianapolis at two. Next day at ten A.M. the stage left for Terre Haute and usually arrived about two next morning.¹⁹

My very dear Daughters, wrote the Foundress, journeys, an image of life, are usually accompanied by a host of unavoidable contradictions. Of this truth we are at the present moment a living proof. You know how anxious we were. . . . Well, here we are at Edinburg, where we arrived two hours after the steam cars had left. Fearing to keep any one waiting, we were up at half past one this morning²⁰ watching, listening, hoping until half past five when we learned that the stage had gone without any one remembering the *nuns*. As this was due to the agent's negligence, we insisted upon his furnishing us with a private conveyance. Despite all the speed of our horses covering thirty miles on an Indiana corduroy "railroad" which obliged us to certify from time to time that we were in possession of all our members, we arrived here only at half past one and the cars had left before noon. We are then compelled to stay here till the return of the steam engine.²¹

A series of small reminders to the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods follows illustrating the burden of minutiae which Mother Theodore carried

¹⁷ [Mai, 1848]. S.M.W.A.

¹⁸ To my dearest Sisters of my own house of Madison. No date. S.M.W.A.

¹⁹ April 29, 1849.

²⁰ Probably in Indianapolis.

²¹ Edinburg, Indiana, 28 octobre, 1846. S.M.W.A..

so lightly: The pigs must be kept in as the mast in the woods will not suffice any longer to keep them fat for the approaching winter killing. If the supply of flour gets low, they must send the oxen with the remaining wheat to the mill to be ground as soon as possible as there is always a long delay there. Everyone must put on winter wear as the mornings and evenings are now very cold. The children, too, must be warmly clad. "I am writing," she continued, "with an iron stick called a pen which I must thrust into the bottom of the bottle for ink at the peril of staining my fingers. What a pity, *n'est-ce-pas?* You know, however, my dearly beloved ones, that at least in my heart I need not go deep to find the tender love which fills it for you all."²² Father Corbe's observation upon their Mother's unfailing activity was doubtless echoed by the Community, "It is beautiful to be a martyr to duty, but may God preserve you and prolong the martyrdom." The transition from the familiar goose quill, upon which the Sisters had been brought up, to the steel pens now coming into general use was not an easy one, and Father Corbe agreed with the Foundress that "these miserable steel pens are good for nothing."

With satisfactory progress noted in the houses everywhere, one elemental need remained, good local superiors. Death had claimed the two best of the French superiors, and their loss was still keenly felt. Bishop Dubourg had noted years earlier as an essential for the success of the religious orders in America "a large and unyielding base of supplies in Europe," and in fact most of the American foundations received frequent contingents of helpers from Europe.²³ Mother Theodore had not yet relinquished the hope of prevailing upon Mother Mary through Bishop de Saint-Palais, who would now be so soon in France, to send two or three experienced Sisters able to take charge of establishments, especially as the American Sisters still manifested little capacity for this type of work. Sister Anastasie showed promise, and Mother Theodore spent much care upon training her in the anticipation of a long career of usefulness. "She is not an old woman like us and will probably reach a great age as both her parents are still living." Though often expressing her regret at their lack of administrative talent, the Foundress never failed to seize the opportunity to reiterate her praise of the American character: "If our American Sisters have not the ardent piety of the French, neither have they the unbridled imaginations which disconcert sometimes in France the most experienced superiors. One finds no hypocrisy, nor dissimulation among the Americans. They are on the contrary filled with uprightness, devotedness, and simplicity, and some of ours are models of innocence and virtue."²⁴

Mother Theodore's great anxiety on her tours of inspection now that the houses were advancing to a flourishing condition was to express her approbation of the good accomplished, to stimulate and encourage Sisters and pupils, and provide for their needs, and only in last place to correct any small abuses which might have crept in. Writing confidentially to Mother Mary, she deplored reprehensions which discouraged without correcting, and she went away sad herself when she left any Sister with a

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Quoted in Garraghan, *Jesuits of the Middle U. S.*, vol. 1, p. 365.

²⁴ A Mère Marie, 18 décembre, 1850. S.M.W.A.

heavy heart. Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote to Mother Theodore about this time commending her compassionate treatment of the erring, "It is much better to employ too much mercy than too much severity. It is always easier to kill a sick person than to resuscitate a corpse."²⁵

Sister Basilide and Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, though superiors during all these years, never seemed able to correct the faults of character which marred their administration and thus were never completely satisfactory to their clear-sighted superior. "Nevertheless," she confided to Mother Mary, "I cannot be angry with Sister Basilide. I love her very much even when I am scolding her." Her favoritism and imprudence did not fade out of her character as the years passed. "She takes a glass of wine when she calls on the *curé*. What is the harm in that?"²⁶ and Mother often warned her about her "gluey" heart. Sister Saint Vincent's rigor in dealing with the Sisters was a constant pain to the Foundress. She was a martinet upon order in the household. Perhaps to her were addressed the counsels upon government still extant in Mother Theodore's own writing which belong to this period. Gentleness²⁷ is her first recommendation. Next she places self-possession, easier for the Americans than for the quick-tempered French. Charity and mutual support conclude the four basic essentials. The remainder of the little document discusses the difficult matter of reproof:

If faults are committed in your house, examine seriously in the presence of God whether you are not yourself the cause of them. If you reflect, I think you will find that you have been wanting in foresight or wisdom, in charity perhaps, or mildness. When an employment is badly done, something, a household utensil perhaps, left out of place, put it back yourself. If you reprove, do it gently, with a sign or a glance. Let it always be a painful thing to you to afflict any of your Sisters by a reprimand. Take her aside. Show her her fault affectionately. Approach her with pious sentiments rooted in faith. When they are ill, take good care of them.²⁸

If she was merciful to the faults of her Sisters, her own imperfections were not viewed so compassionately and often come under her pen with admirable humility. "Still your poor Theodore of old, but if my fervor does not ripen, my heart never grows cold. If I no longer run after affection, I suffer much from the loss of it." "Mother Saint Charles's neglect is truly a very bitter trial to me."²⁹

Mother Mary, recently re-elected at Ruillé, had now been in office for twenty-two years. Bishop Bouvier had announced to Mother Theodore that one of the requirements of the new French republic was that religious devoted to education must be without exception provided with diplomas, an unheard of thing at that time when private education in the home was so general and so highly esteemed in Europe. To obtain diplomas the religious must undergo public examinations with secular aspirants of all classes. "This will be a hard trial for these poor children," commented the Bishop, "your Sisters of Ruillé as well as the others, and especially for the cloistered religious."³⁰ The political situation in France was still of

²⁵ 21 mars, 1851. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ 7 novembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

²⁷ *Douceur*.

²⁸ S.M.W.A.

²⁹ A Mère Marie, 10 juillet, 1851. S.M.W.A.

³⁰ A Mother Theodore, 24 juin, 1848. S.M.W.A.

absorbing interest to the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and they eagerly scanned the pages of Father Perché's French paper from New Orleans, *Le Propagateur Catholique*, for news of events in Europe. The republic of 1848 had inspired very little confidence among the Community's friends in France. The two Catholic journalists Veuillot and Aubineau were still in the breach fighting the battles of justice and Christianity, and they looked across the ocean for help and encouragement.

You are not so retired from the world, wrote Aubineau to Mother Theodore, nor so absorbed in the works of your mission as not to have heard of the storms which have swept over our France. Prayers are needed for our country now more than ever and especially for those of your friends who are, as I am, under arms every day. For that is our situation. . . . Oh, pray that we may have courage and that lukewarmness may not overcome us. The combats of the Lord are often harsh, and we have many causes for discouragement. I hope that part of our strength, both for Veuillot and for me, will come from the chapel at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.⁸¹

Though Mother Theodore could advert now and then in her letters to the greater freedom enjoyed in America, she shared the monarchical sympathies which long characterized the majority of the French religious orders. "I can never believe that a republic can be established upon the ruins of a throne which has lasted for centuries."⁸² The situation quieted down, however, by 1851. Louis Napoleon was now president. "Our republic is much less solid than yours," wrote Bishop Bouvier. "Nevertheless, it leaves us in a certain tranquillity more even than we had under the monarchy."⁸³ Bishop de Saint-Palais was in France at the time of the *coup d'état* of December 2, 1851, when Louis Napoleon took over entire control of the government. The Bishop saw the barricades in the streets under the windows of his Paris hotel, but he saw no necessity for fleeing from the city as he had done in 1830.

Mother Theodore had gone north to Fort Wayne in May by steamboat on the river. She returned in more leisurely fashion on the canal. She was always at home for the harvest season on the farm which ran approximately from mid-June when the wheat was ripe to the first of August. A lull of some weeks preceded the gathering of the fruit, and of the corn usually after the frost. The late rainy spring of 1851 was followed in early April by a distressing drouth which imperiled the crops during many weeks. At last at the end of June a sudden downpour relieved the thirsty earth but spoiled much of the hay. The Sisters, inspired by their Mother toiling at their head, worked with a will in the suffocating heat to get it in. "O my God," sighed at last the weary Foundress, "You will keep an account of this." On several of the long rambles in the woods which they loved, they gathered red currants for jelly, medicinal herbs and especially the *tilleul* or linden blossoms, which made a *tisane* highly prized as a nerve tonic.

The French Sisters never lost their wondering admiration of the magnificent American forests still dense around Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1851, eleven years after the coming of the Sisters of Providence to Vigo County and the subsequent settlement of the locality and extensive clear-

⁸¹ Léon Aubineau à Mother Theodore, 26 juillet, 1848.

⁸² A Mère Marie, 5 septembre, 1848. S.M.W.A.

⁸³ A Mother Theodore, 25 février, 1849. S.M.W.A.

ing for farms. "We discover anew every time something grand, useful and beautiful in the great forests of Indiana. At each step one marvels at the grandeur, the power, and goodness of our God. How generously He has provided for our wants, I would almost say, for our pleasures."³⁴ The woods continued for many years and until comparatively recent times the preferred holiday haunt of both pupils and Sisters. They were also a favorite theme in the Sisters' letters to Europe, and Bishop Bouvier never tired of reading of the forest where his daughters dwelt.

How can I give you an idea, Monseigneur, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, of the magnificence of our forests; in spring and summer their beauty is beyond imagination. Above our heads stretches a vault of verdure that the most ardent rays of the sun can hardly penetrate, and beneath is a chaos of branches and foliage of every form and shade and fragrance. Brooks, channeled by no human hand but formed by the spring rains, flow along avenues between the trees and shrubs, surrounding and bearing away the leaves and flowers like myriad bouquets on these cool cascades. Their beauty is not the sole value of our forests. Like other Robinson Crusoes, we are always finding something new in it. First is the abundant wood, and what marvelous wood! One could never imagine the number, size, and height of the trees. A thousand useful plants spring up in the soil fertilized by the decay which makes it an excellent field for germination. The linden tree grows there in great abundance and can calm the most irritable nerves; the walnut tree yields its winter provision, a long moss gathered by the rivers can be dried to furnish passable mattresses. The proprietors of the forest before man conquered it have not yet decided to abandon their dark and quiet retreat. Birds of rich color still live there.³⁵

Deer were, in fact, still seen in considerable numbers in 1852 in Indiana and Illinois, and the fields were alive with grouse and partridges, and the woods with squirrels.³⁶ Despite the many disadvantages of their remote location, Mother Theodore could truthfully say, "I love our woods and our solitude very much," a sentiment which found an echo in every Sister's heart.³⁷

These quiet years were formative in the struggle to extend the field of Catholic education in Indiana. A formidable adversary to the private schools was rising, however, in the movement for free public instruction. The agitation for a state-supported system of public schools, which runs all through these years, had begun in Indiana in the General Assembly of 1846. It was an offshoot of the work carried to completion in Massachusetts by Horace Mann and adopted gradually in the other Eastern states. Secularization, which was no part of Mann's original plan, had resulted from the rival claims of religious minorities, Catholics, Jews, and various sects, thus riveting upon the public education of American youth the increasingly heavy yoke of a godless intellectualism. The fight against sharing state funds with private schools waged first in New York City led to a decision in 1842 to deny subsidies to any church-directed school.

Caleb Mills, a Presbyterian minister born and reared in New Hampshire, and principal from 1833 of the Presbyterian school at Crawfordsville, Indiana, which eventually became Wabash College, was the protagonist of

³⁴ *J. and L.*, p. 299.

³⁵ *L'Indiana*, p. 209.

³⁶ *Wabash Courier*, February 14, 1852.

³⁷ A Mgr. Bouvier, 10 juillet, 1850. S.M.W.A.

public free schools in the state. Prejudice against the movement was at first very great. Mills, however, in a series of six messages printed in the *Wabash Courier* in Terre Haute and elsewhere in the state, and later circulated in pamphlet form, endeavored to break down public opinion and rouse the favorable attention of the legislators. Public grade schools were cheaper than private schools, he averred, and the system would equal them by including primary, grammar, and high school subjects with, during part of the year, music, writing, and drawing.

Legislation for free schools was a very gradual evolution beginning in 1849. By the law of that year each county was permitted to vote for or against the movement. So indifferent, however, was the response that public schools did not begin to function to any notable extent till the creation of a state school board in 1852. Indiana gave up only very slowly the indifference with which it met the insistent appeals of "One of the People" in the newspapers of the state, for only some years later was Mills discovered to be their author. Adverse decisions by the Supreme Court eventually checked the public school movement till after the Civil War.

Though recognized at once as a threat to the private schools, such was the apathy in Indiana toward the movement that it was not till January, 1853, that Mother Theodore made any reference to the subject in the Community diary. Free public grade schools were at that time about to be established in Terre Haute. Nevertheless, menaced always as they were by dearth of funds, the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods viewed the advent of public schools with the deepest concern. "O my God, come to our aid," was the anxious prayer of the Foundress.³⁸ The eventual result to Catholic education of the movement was the organization of the parochial school system, made possible by the burden of double taxation which Catholics have carried ever since.

Meantime affairs went steadily forward in the little educational world of the Sisters of Providence. Closing day was appointed for all the schools this year (1850) for July 24, and on the thirtieth the two-day public examination began at the academy under the Reverend John B. Chassé and the Bishop's attorney, Mr. Benjamin Thomas, both of Vincennes. While the other Sisters had been at work in the hay field, Sister Saint Francis Xavier had painted a number of pretty premiums as rewards for success in studies. The exercises of each day were announced in the *Wabash Courier*³⁹ to begin on the first two days at eight in the morning and terminate at noon. The last day closed with the *distribution des prix*. Early on August 1 guests began to arrive for the final program now held indoors. The children came off well in the examination and pleased their observant teachers by "their modesty and refinement."

Our boarding school is doing very well, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier a few days later to her mother. The pupils gave a little play, and several wore Breton costumes. Louison⁴⁰ made a Cancalaise headdress which delighted the Americans. . . . Then came the awarding of prizes which Mother Theodore presented to the parents. I was pleased to see these men, apparently so cold, wipe away a tear as they

³⁸ Community Diary.

³⁹ July 20, 1850.

⁴⁰ Sister Monique, who had crossed the ocean with Mother Theodore in 1843.

kissed their daughters. When the crown for excellence was conferred upon Mary Gwin, one of your little Catholic girls, her poor mother was almost choked with tears as she placed on her child's head the crown which I myself had the pleasure of making.⁴¹

A few weeks earlier three baptisms and First Communions had given to Sisters and pupils a day of spiritual joy in which Catholics and Protestants shared alike. True to their character as members of the "devout female sex," so quietly did these latter now fit into the school that no record exists of their comparative number. They probably now equaled or even outnumbered the Catholic pupils as was the case for many years. Financially they were a very definite asset as the Catholics were, as a rule, still poor.

After the *distribution des prix* only a few days elapsed till the retreat. This year a saint was given to the Community to expound the telling and weighty truths of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises in the now crowded little convent chapel. The missionary Sisters were arriving every day, though a sharp flurry of cholera in Vincennes detained two of them to care for the patients. The Bishop hurried to Saint Mary's arriving a day later than the retreat master, Father Francis d'Hoop. This learned and saintly Jesuit, a Belgian by birth, had come to America in 1837 with two other young men who, later as Jesuits, were to play an important part in the development of the Congregation of Providence in America, Arnold Damen and John L. Gleizal. Father d'Hoop⁴² was still a young man in 1850 and was the next year named rector of Saint Aloysius's College, Louisville. Ben J. Webb,⁴³ the Kentucky historian, eulogizes his learning, his effective preaching, his zeal as a confessor, and his generous kindness of heart to the poor and distressed; "but Father Hippolyte Du Pontavice, no casual observer, paid an even more glowing tribute to this holy man at his death in 1855:

My congregation and I had the happiness of being blessed with the last labors of a good Jesuit, Father Francis d'Hope [d'Hoop]. He gave us the jubilee, then died of the suffering he endured on his way home in the state of infirmity in which he was. I retain, and will retain all my life the sweetest remembrances of this holy man although I saw him only twice: the first time five years ago on his way to give a retreat at Saint Mary's and the last time when he spent nine days and eleven nights with me. In this short time the firmest friendship grew up between us. He was from Brussels, but French at heart. Oh, how he loved our France! I will never forget him in my poor prayers, but I hope that he prays also for me and my people.⁴⁵

Despite his impaired health which he succeeded in concealing so successfully that not even his most intimate associates were aware of it,⁴⁶ this apostolic man devoted himself assiduously to the work of the retreat. The

⁴¹ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 235.

⁴² Born January 11, 1813; died March 23, 1855. His remains lie in the cemetery of the Sisters of Charity at Nazareth with those of eight other Jesuits who died in Kentucky.

⁴³ Baptized Benedict Joseph for the revered Bishop Flaget, like so many other Kentuckians. *Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

⁴⁵ DuPontavice Collection, SS. Pierre et Paul, 1855. N.D.U.A.

⁴⁶ Webb, *Centenary of Catholicity*, p. 437.

August heat in the crowded little wooden convent was all but unbearable, but the long hours of silence and prayer punctuated by the fervent addresses of the retreat master succeeded one another in the usual atmosphere of earnest sacrifice. Spring and fall were really the best seasons in Indiana, especially the latter. The long bright autumn days were therefore always utilized to the fullest. Circumstances combined, however, to concentrate the most arduous physical and mental activities of the Community in the summer months when the closing of the schools, the work of the farm, and the spiritual activities of the retreat found them all with vitality at a low ebb. The torrid heat of Indiana's July and August seemed increasingly hard upon the Foundress after 1847. The winter temperature of approximately thirty degrees and often much lower, told also upon the Sisters shivering in their old poorly heated shack, as science has demonstrated that the optimum outdoor temperature for physical activity is approximately sixty to sixty-eight degrees, for mental activity some degrees cooler.⁴⁷

In the mind of the observant Bishop during these oppressive days of the retreat, however, a conviction was crystallizing. The Community must have a new and larger convent, and they must have it at once. The ramshackle two-story Thralls house was now evidently totally inadequate for the needs of the growing Community, especially in the summer. "This good Bishop is always devoted to us," wrote the Foundress. "He suffered very much during the retreat at seeing us so poorly housed."⁴⁸ It had been in reality a period of intense suffering.

I do not know how we made our retreat, she continued. We could hardly move in our wretched hovel where we were crowded together with the sun darting its burning rays upon us. The heat was stifling. . . . What grieves me most is to see Our Lord so poorly lodged and our sick Sisters in a common dormitory where the beds almost touch one another under a plank roof.⁴⁹

Very delicate Sisters like Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Angelina suffered acutely, especially in the oppressive nights of August often without a breath of air. "They suffocate in summer and freeze in winter. That is a fact."⁵⁰ Sister Saint Francis's life was prolonged during all these years by an almost daily miracle. In summer the heat caused an oppression known in the Community as "Sister Saint Francis's smothering spells," which gave great uneasiness to Mother Theodore though Sister herself insisted that they would never be fatal.

When the Bishop placed his decision regarding a new motherhouse before the Council, the members could not but fully agree, especially as he generously supplemented it by the promise of an immediate gift of five hundred dollars, to be duplicated on his return from France. The excellent retreat master was completely exhausted after the eight days' strenuous labor and the long ceremonies at the close of the retreat and was ill and cared for by Sister Olympiade for some days. Monseigneur pre-

⁴⁷ S. S. Visher, *Climate of Indiana* (Indiana University, 1944), p. 441.

⁴⁸ A Mère Marie, 12 décembre, 1850. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

sided at the reception of four novices⁵¹ and five professions,⁵² and at Benediction and the chant of the *Te Deum* in the church. In the afternoon after Vespers he addressed the Community in one of his fatherly discourses, and inaugurating a custom observed by each of the Bishops of Indianapolis to this day, himself gave to each Sister her obedience for the year. His Lordship remained a week till Father d'Hoop had recovered sufficiently to travel as far as Vincennes. Bishop de Saint-Palais was devotedly attached to the Jesuit order and showed this regard on all occasions. He would not leave Saint Mary's till Father d'Hoop had recovered. The annual exodus of the missionary Sisters followed closely upon his departure.

To this retreat of 1850 belongs also an important procedure on the part of the councilors which Sister Saint Francis Xavier communicated to Bishop Bouvier many months later during Mother Theodore's absence in Madison:

I am profiting by the absence of our dear superior to write to you what we did at our last retreat. You will think that she has now no one whom she can trust since I have joined the conspirators. I wished very much to tell you of our intrigue, but I was obliged to wait, for if she had seen my letter all her joy would be gone. Poor Mother, she always flatters herself that we will let her go away in peace, and that she will soon be relieved of her burden. Lest she might be overtaken by too great a temptation during Monseigneur de Saint-Palais's absence, we asked him to accede to our desires. I will copy his Lordship's letter:

My dear daughters,

Convinced like you that the best interests of the Community require that Mother Theodore, foundress of the Sisters of Providence in Indiana, should remain superior for life, I yield to your wishes and confirm with all my heart the appointment of the Bishop of Le Mans.

✠ MAURICE, *Bp. of Vinc.*⁵³

This proceeding remained entirely secret for many months, known only to Father Corbe and the councilors. The one most deeply concerned was still in ignorance of it at the date of Sister Saint Francis Xavier's letter seven months later.

The Foundress was in fact planning to retire. Her failing health and the difficulty she experienced in caring for the growing Community, for her correspondence, and for the missions were accentuating a longing to hand over her responsibilities to someone younger and stronger, and retire to Ruillé to prepare for death. The election of the two assistants in 1848 had not in reality given her the help she so much needed. Sister Mary Cecilia was fully occupied as superior of the academy, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier's delicate health made the novitiate a full employment for her. "I, who have not a fourth of your duties," she wrote to Mother Mary, "am often quite overwhelmed by mine. Each day I become more broken down, more incapable, and also more lazy, and yet, for me also the work increases while the strength diminishes."⁵⁴

Despite her many anxieties and her almost continual physical suffer-

⁵¹ Sister Louise, Sister Mary Antoinette, Sister Emmanuel, and Sister Matilda.

⁵² Sister Maria, Sister Saint Urbain, Sister Alphonse, Sister Victoire, and Sister Benedict.

⁵³ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, pp. 354-355.

⁵⁴ A Mère Marie, 10 juillet, 1851. S.M.W.A.

ing, however, her charming gaiety never forsook her, and she was still the life of the Community recreations. Her bright cheerfulness caused them as Sister Saint Francis Xavier said, to forget many a little misery. One of the pet dreams of the postulants, now that they had learned enough French to understand him, was that Bishop Bouvier would surprise them by a visit to their forest. The ocean could now be crossed in eight days, and one could make the journey from New York to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in four, almost all if his Lordship wished, in a canal boat. The Bishop learned of their proposal with his usual benevolent interest, though his age and his pressing duties in France combined to make it only a dream.

As soon as the missionary Sisters had gone, Mother Theodore lost not a moment in embarking upon the new and somewhat formidable enterprise which Monseigneur had imposed upon her, a lengthy building program, more extensive and costly than any she had yet undertaken. Neither she nor the Bishop now hesitated a minute in incurring the necessary indebtedness, although neither the Madison house, purchased a year earlier, nor the new establishment in Terre Haute was as yet entirely paid for. These two houses with the motherhouse were the only ones owned at this time by the Community. The policy followed at that time but since abandoned, was for the Congregation to own the school and convent property on the missions. Vincennes was however still the possession of the diocese and Jasper of the parish. Of Saint Augustine's, Mother Theodore wrote to Mother Saint Charles, "We are promised the deed for the beautiful house at Fort Wayne."⁵⁵ To some of his priests the Bishop's readiness to incur financial obligations was a source of uneasiness. Father DuPontavice told him frankly that he feared he would sink himself and the diocese into debt. As a result the good priest was only further convinced, however, of the Bishop's care in making decisions and his subsequent firmness in adhering to them. "I do not think," he concluded, "that my advice will ever weigh against his judgment."⁵⁶

The Bishop after his return to Vincennes continued to interest himself materially in the prospective building enterprise, and to facilitate matters he further proposed to keep the proceeds of the Vincennes missions from August, 1850, for four years and to give instead twelve hundred dollars yearly to the Community. This arrangement, added to the sums mentioned above, would assure nearly six thousand dollars as Monseigneur's contribution to the building fund, a real necessity, as only seventy dollars had remained *en caisse* when Father Corbe as Ecclesiastical Superior had audited the Community accounts on August 23. Mother Theodore, however, before September had already signed the first contract with the Pottsville quarry for building stone for the foundation. For this work she must supply the tools, purchasing or renting them. She evidently foresaw continual delays and many obstacles. "When will this house be built! May God give us the grace to let it remain in nothingness rather than ever be profaned by a serious sin. O Mary, take it under thy protection."⁵⁷ Nevertheless, with admirable foresight she continued to gather

⁵⁵ 1 juin, 1849. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁶ DuPontavice Collection, 18 janvier, 1850. N.D.U.A.

⁵⁷ Community Diary.

the necessary materials, and on September 18 the men employed on the farm made the long trip to the quarry and returned with the first load of stone. Père Michel was in charge and devoted himself assiduously to his task. Eventually he cut almost all the stone required free of charge as his personal offering toward the new building.

This Indiana sandstone so generally used for many years as building stone was later found to weather badly and has now been superseded by Indiana's famous limestone, which came into use in the 1870's. In 1850, however, the Community in general was considered fortunate in being able to procure the needed stone so near at hand with comparative ease. As Mother Theodore's Providence was destined to only thirty years of use till it was destroyed by fire in 1889, the unsatisfactory character of the local sandstone was not so early apparent.

In finance as in everything else, Monseigneur was as good as his word, and early in November, 1850, came his first cash advance, \$413. The school year at the academy, however, was proving a financial disappointment owing to the reduced number of pupils. Know-Nothingism too was beginning to raise its ugly head. "We are as poor as Job. It is impossible to think of building," the Foundress wrote to France in December, 1850. "Bishop de Saint-Palais gave us four hundred dollars last month to purchase materials, but I was obliged to use it to buy provisions which are almost all half again as dear as last year. Our pupils on the missions are also less numerous, another reason for our diminished income."⁵⁸ The hay, oats, and potatoes on the farm had been an almost total loss for which the good yield of wheat, corn, and fruit hardly compensated. "All things considered, we will have to remain as we are," was Mother Theodore's final conclusion, "for it is impossible to build this year. . . . We have been ten years in our cabin. With the help of God we can live there a little longer."⁵⁹

From this time on long accounts for supplies of all kinds from Terre Haute general stores, Bement's, Groverman's, Nippert and Molitor's, and others, now involving hundreds of dollars were carefully copied by the Foundress in her day book. Many commodities which ten years earlier had been generally manufactured in the Hoosier homes could now be purchased more economically. It had even become more advantageous to buy pork from the numerous packing houses in Terre Haute than to rear the animals on the Community farm though they still lived largely on the forest mast. Even soft soap, the pioneer necessity, could now be bought for ten cents a gallon, and wood for fuel could be purchased by the cord cheaper than the workmen could fell the trees and cut them to the proper size.

Some commodities long remained unduly expensive, but labor was still cheap. Lorenzo Thralls's wage for a day in the hay field was equaled by the price of a paper of pins. Despite the fact that President Van Buren had established a ten-hour day in the government service in Washington some years earlier, the day on the farm was still practically from dawn to dark. The Community was still obliged to depend upon Louis Alvey's carpenter shop for school necessities, piano stools and cupboards, picture

⁵⁸ A Mgr. Bouvier, 18 décembre, 1850. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

frames, rulers, and swings for the playground. All the benches he made now for the classrooms, unlike the earlier ones, had backs however, although many years were to elapse before any further change in the direction of personal comfort would follow. By this time at the academy "parlor stoves" had replaced the old open fireplaces, and sugar cakes, crackers, candy, lemon syrup, and chocolate for the pupils alternated in the accounts with the essential eggs, butter, flour, and meat. Some time later Mother Theodore bought a washing machine, "the first I have seen,"⁶⁰ she wrote.

Monseigneur's coming trip to Europe was now scheduled for the spring of 1851. The visitation was complete and had revealed the diocese to be in excellent condition. "The Catholics and the churches are multiplying," wrote Father DuPontavice. "The asylums . . . opened for orphans of both sexes are filling up and will prosper. The work . . . is going forward, and the good God I hope will bless it. . . . He has a seminary which has given me a pleasure I can hardly write. . . ."⁶¹ In fact, as a means of supplying his great need of priests, the Bishop had reopened the seminary in September, 1850, in the "small house on Second Street in Vincennes, near the Sisters' free school" with the Reverend John B. Chassé in charge. This excellent priest, a devoted and experienced educator, had been conducting a boys' school in the basement of the library built by Bishop de la Hailandière near the Cathedral. In addition to outstanding executive ability, he had pronounced literary and scientific tastes, and to him the academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was indebted about this time for its first piece of physical apparatus brought from France, a handsomely mounted electric machine with brass fittings⁶² for the purpose of generating static electricity, which he came to Saint Mary's himself to install in the early science department of which it was long a distinguished ornament. It was transported to Saint Mary's with some difficulty as it had to travel as a person in the stage and across the river later at the price of five dollars.

Father Chassé, now thirty-four years old, *le bon Chassé*, as Bishop de la Hailandière had called him, belonged to the Breton group among the Indiana missionaries. A native of Rennes, where he had entered the Eudist Society, he had come to Vincennes in 1839. Ordained in 1840, he had been professor of Latin language and literature at Saint Gabriel's College and president in Father Bellier's absence. The "devout and solemn manner of saying Mass," which characterized him all his life, was the means of his securing twenty thousand francs for the Vincennes diocese from the officials of the Propagation of the Faith, in Lyons in 1843. He had been refused, and the very official who had refused him changed his mind after seeing him at the altar. He was identified with the seminary for many years and was later pastor at Washington and Terre Haute. His last years were spent as chaplain at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods where he lies buried near his friend and compatriot, Father Corbe.

Mr. Henry S. Cauthorn, his pupil and acolyte, gives a picture of this small but compactly built priest whose strong and impressive voice filled the church when he said Mass or sang during divine service. As a man, a professor,

⁶⁰ Community Diary.

⁶¹ DuPontavice Collection, 27 janvier, 1851. N.D.U.A.

⁶² Probably Ramsden's plate machine, still preserved.

and a priest he was always gentle and kind, but at the same time wanted everything done . . . with scrupulous exactness and propriety. In the classroom, if anything occurred that gave him offense, a dark frown would overshadow his face in a moment, and his forefinger would be placed by his nose to signify his displeasure and as a rebuke to the wrongdoer. But his genuine good nature which always controlled him, would not allow the frown to tarry, and a genial smile would succeed the frown as a token of peace and reconciliation.⁶³

Father Chassé was a very prayerful man who could often be found at night prostrate before the altar in the church, and he cherished all his life a pronounced inclination for the silence and austerity of the Trappist vocation. In his last years at Terre Haute, however, when he wished to take it up, his age and infirmities were an insuperable obstacle. To this pious and learned man, Bishop de Saint-Palais could leave the seminary without any misgiving during his coming sojourn in Europe which now promised to be a lengthy one. Eight students were admitted to the reopened seminary, which was henceforth to share with the orphans the Bishop's prime solicitude.

The destitute children of the diocese were now, both boys and girls, permanently provided for under the care of the daughters of Mother Theodore. The poor immigrant or the Irish canal digger, prostrated by the cholera or the dreaded winter fever, could breathe his last in peace knowing that in the Bishop's house at Vincennes there was a noble-hearted prelate who would be a father to his orphan children. The number of children in both institutions grew steadily, sometimes tragically. One day about this time a cart stopped before the Bishop's door, and a man, apparently intoxicated, alighted saying that he was dying and had brought his four children to the Bishop, who he knew would be their kind father. One of the priests took the little girl from his arms to carry her across the street to Sister Mary Margaret at the girls' orphanage telling the stricken father he would return at once. When he did so he found the man writhing on the ground in the agonies of cholera. The Bishop took him into his house, put him to bed, and sent at once for the doctor. Despite every care, however, the poor man expired before dawn fortified with all the spiritual aids which Monseigneur and the two assistant priests could give him. The four children thus automatically became the Bishop's charge.

References to Monseigneur's trip to France appear in Mother Theodore's letters all during this winter, as she was planning to send "some products of our forest" to Ruillé, to the Countess de Marescot, "the first benefactress and I may say, the foundress of our house of the woods," as Mother Theodore loved to call her, and also to other friends, as Monseigneur's itinerary included visits to the French motherhouse and to Bishop Bouvier at Le Mans. The Foundress was very desirous that the French superiors and especially Bishop Bouvier should make Bishop de Saint-Palais's acquaintance and learn at first hand his fine qualities of heart and mind. "You will see," she wrote, "what a good, kind face he has. . . . If we do not accomplish much good, it will not be the fault of this prelate. . . . He is a true father to our Community. In our days of trial he was our support

⁶³ *History of Saint Francis Xavier's Cathedral*, p. 184.

and consolation. Now he is happy to be able to protect us and confer benefits upon us." ⁶⁴ As the colts at the barn had grown well, she was now sending Logan to drive a pretty span of two-year-olds, Queen Victoria and Delphy, by easy stages, to draw up before the episcopal mansion at Vincennes on Christmas Eve as Monseigneur's Christmas gift.

The winter of 1850-51 proved the mildest the Sisters had experienced since coming to Indiana, and the work of gathering building materials for the new motherhouse went on almost uninterruptedly. During January the workmen were cutting and hauling the wood to be used to burn the brick, and in April Mother Theodore was able to sign the contract for brickmaking with "a good honest man of whom every one speaks well," Ross of Terre Haute, one of six brothers of Scottish origin who had been in the business for twenty years. The brickyard had to be constructed on the place and the kiln built, and after many delays only in May was the work actually under way, "in the month of Mary. O my good Mother," wrote the Foundress in the diary, "it is to you we owe all our prosperity, spiritual and temporal. Everything pleasing and fortunate that has come to us has come on a day consecrated to Mary."

The mild winter permitted an earlier start than usual on the annual tour of the missions, and Mother Theodore was on her way to Madison and the other southern establishments on Ash Wednesday, March 5. A month later she was at Saint Mary's Female School at Vincennes prostrated by a sudden and severe attack which she recognized at once as the dreaded cholera. In a few hours she saw herself reduced to the last extremity. Dr. Baty was called and prescribed, but the Foundress turned as ever to her Heavenly Protectress. "After a 'Memorare' addressed to the Blessed Virgin by the patient herself," she recorded later, "the malady suddenly stopped." ⁶⁵ The distressing and painful symptoms ceased and did not return. Though very weak, the patient was able after a week to return to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. With the usual hardships of travel of the period, the carriage broke down on the way from Terre Haute, and the Foundress arrived home, weak as she was, in the wagon of a neighboring farmer.

The question of opening new missions was a perennial one now that the Community was growing steadily. Mother Theodore's old friend, Father Perché of New Orleans, had advised her again to proceed slowly, but Bishop Blanc was still insisting upon a colony of Sisters of Providence for Louisiana. Bishop de Saint-Palais, however, was consistently opposed to any establishments outside the diocese of Vincennes. The first chaplain at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, the Eudist Father Buteux, now stationed at Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi, in the diocese of Natchez, where some of the faculty of Saint Gabriel's College had gone on leaving Vincennes, was urgently asking for Sisters for an extensive establishment he was planning, academy, orphanage, day school, and poor school also "a novitiate and a retreat for aged and sick Sisters for whom the northern climate is too cold." ⁶⁶ He had already purchased a site on the ocean, to the price of which he hoped Mother Theodore would contribute. The ladies of

⁶⁴ A Mère Saint-Charles, 1 juin, 1849. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁵ Community Diary.

⁶⁶ 12 avril, 1851. S.M.W.A.

Lafayette had also besieged Mother Theodore during her recent visit to open a house there, one Protestant lady offering two hundred dollars toward the establishment, with others making equally generous promises. This house would no doubt have been established at once, as Bishop de Saint-Palais was willing, but the pastor, Father Michael Clarke, manifested an indifference out of keeping with his earlier sentiments, and could not find it possible to secure a house for the Sisters. At Evansville the people were even more urgent, and the Bishop had recently purchased a site which would be available to the Sisters. At Indianapolis also everything pointed towards an early foundation. Evansville was, however, eventually to be the next mission opened, and the schools in Lafayette and Indianapolis only came into being after the death of the Foundress.

The Bishop's early departure for Europe was now a certainty. Two important preliminary decisions had first, however, to be made. One of the priests of the diocese must be appointed administrator in his absence, and another must be his traveling companion. For the former post Father Hippolyte DuPontavice of Madison, who had been Vicar General since Bishop de Saint-Palais's consecration, was the natural choice, but he felt that the care of his large parish would take all his time and recommended Father Corbe. Originally the Bishop had intended taking Father Simon Petit Lalumiere as his companion, but eventually Father Kundek accompanied him. In May Monseigneur was at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for his farewell visit, a longer stay than usual as he confirmed a class of twenty-two, and as many circumstances required to be regulated before his voyage with Father Corbe, who now knew that he was to be appointed administrator. The orphans by this time numbered one hundred and four. The Bishop had provided for their maintenance for the coming year to the best of his ability, and he relied on the superiors of the asylums, Sister Joachim and Sister Mary Margaret, with Mother Theodore's help, to care for them during his absence. Thus far with careful management the Christmas collection had sufficed. During the summer Mr. Heitz, the music professor, gave at Vincennes for the benefit of the two asylums a concert of piano solos varied by English songs and the original couplets set to music which appeared on all similar programs at this time. To the financial burden of the orphans' maintenance, always a heavy one for the poor diocese of Vincennes, the generous Bishop was now adding substantial contributions towards the building of the motherhouse at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Mother Theodore was deeply touched by his generosity. Eventually other friends of the Community became interested especially among the clergy, and to her surprise she received, in response to a request by some unknown person who knew of their need, a thousand florins toward the building fund about this time from the Ludwig-missionsverein founded by King Ludwig I of Bavaria.⁹⁷

The Community saw Monseigneur depart on May 31 with heavy hearts. A week later Father Corbe received his official appointment as Vicar General and Administrator during the Bishop's absence. Though the Wabash was out of its banks and the river bottom had been almost impassable for a month, Father Corbe set out for Vincennes at once, and

⁹⁷ Community Diary.

Mother Theodore too arrived there shortly afterward accompanied by Sister Olympiade on her annual tour of the missions, now delayed by circumstances over a month. On June 17 Monseigneur left alone for New York via Madison and Cincinnati and sailed for France on the twenty-eighth to be absent for a year and four months.

His traveling companion, Father Kundek, rejoined him in Europe only after many months. "Our good Bishop left yesterday at 5 o'clock P.M. for Cincinnati, alone like a Pelicane [sic] in the Wilderness of this World," he wrote in characteristic style to Mother Theodore.

This affected me more than even my departure from Jasper. . . . I am a citizen of Madison for some weeks, separated at present from our Bishop to meet him in August somewhere in France. What vicissitudes in human life! I acted by that principle, the truly burning love of God cannot be inactive where her exertions are required peremptorily. Then don't wonder at my stay at Madison, but admire the finger of God in it.⁶⁸

Father Anthony Carius, a young Alsatian priest whom Bishop de la Hailandière had met in Europe in 1845, had been in charge of the German Catholics in Madison since January, 1850, and had begun to organize Saint Mary's parish and build a church. Difficulties arose, however, and Father Kundek, with the Bishop's consent, delayed to bring the undertaking to completion. Only at the end of July did he leave Indiana, and after a lengthy and leisurely tour through Canada and New England reached New York during the last days of October and sailed for Liverpool on November 4. As he planned a series of visits in Ireland and northern France, he was not able to rejoin Bishop de Saint-Palais for several weeks after landing in Europe.

The voyage of 1851 was not the first time that Monseigneur de Saint-Palais had returned to his native land. He had been in France in 1845, when Bishop de la Hailandière was there and had appealed then to the charity of his friends and relatives in favor of his poor mission. In 1851 he returned to visit, this time as Bishop, his native parish of La Salvétat and the homes of his now scattered family. Both his parents had died, and his youngest sister, a Sister of Charity, was far from France, a missionary on one of the islands of the Greek Archipelago. The Bishop visited his eldest brother, Baron Edouard de Saint-Palais at the chateau of Bonneval, and his second brother, Captain Louis de Saint-Palais, at the chateau of Peyrins near the city of Castres in the old province of Languedoc. Here the Bishop administered Confirmation in the modest village church, his little niece among those to receive it, although too young as yet for First Communion. He was at the home of his youngest brother at Pont d'Assou near Lavaur on September 22, the feast of the soldier martyr Saint Maurice and his heroic companions of the Theban Legion, the Bishop's name day, which became the occasion of an old time French family *fête*.

After these few weeks consecrated to the duties of family ties and friendship, everywhere welcomed with affection and honor, His Lordship proceeded to Lyons where the officials of the Propagation of the Faith consented to continue to the diocese of Vincennes the pecuniary grants which they had previously decided to suppress. The Bishop's time was

⁶⁸ June 24, 1851. S.M.W.A.

now all devoted to the work which had brought him to Europe, the quest for priests and funds, and also for postulants for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. His three nieces showed no vocation for the Indiana mission, and all three eventually became Sisters of Charity as his three sisters had done. Nor did Mother Theodore's eldest niece, Marie-Thérèse Le Touzé, who had now been for six years a member of the Ruillé Community, show at this time any desire to join her aunt in America. His Lordship everywhere he went sought, however, for fervent and zealous souls who would devote their lives to missionary work in Indiana as Sisters of Providence. Eventually his quest met with distinguished success as did also his search for the German speaking priests he needed so urgently to minister to the newly arrived immigrants in his diocese. After leaving Lyons the Bishop paid for this purpose a visit to Alsace and Lorraine, and in December he was in Paris where Father Kundek rejoined him, and they proceeded to Germany.

No letter from the Bishop reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods till January, 1852, and during all these months the affairs of the diocese occupied Father Corbe and kept him for considerable periods away from Saint Mary's. At this time, too, a great anxiety and sorrow weighed upon Mother Theodore in the serious illness of Sister Angelina. Her health had been failing for some time with no appreciable improvement from either Dr. Baty's or Dr. Read's care. Only an almost superhuman courage kept her up and enabled her to continue her lessons to the advanced music pupils until May. But now her death was seen to be only a matter of weeks. "The loss of this dear daughter will be keenly felt in our house," wrote Mother Theodore, "more particularly as she is our mistress of music and of water color painting, and also the one upon whom I could rely for my English correspondence. . . . She is a model of innocence, of virtue, and of talents. Death makes sport of all these things."⁶⁹ Earlier in this same year another death had grieved the Community, that of Sister Marie Joseph at Fort Wayne already described.

The period of the great heats was now approaching. As the Community increased, the inconvenience and suffering occasioned by the crowded quarters in their poor shack of a convent became greater, especially during retreat. All during July and August Sister Angelina was critically ill, languishing in the only infirmary the Community possessed, a twelve-foot long attic just under the plank roof, heated by the burning summer sun. "This abode of suffering is a real purgatory,"⁷⁰ where the dying Sister could hardly breathe. Now if never before, the new motherhouse was seen to be an imperative necessity. "Our dear Lord knows that we cannot wait any longer," sighed the Foundress. There were now sixty persons to be accommodated for many hours of each day during the retreat in the poor little chapel only eleven and a half feet wide and some twenty feet long originally built from the porch of the Thralls house. One Sister, who was now no more, had been taken ill from the extreme heat there the previous year, Sister Marie Joseph Pardeillan. Of the others the Foundress acknowledged, "They nearly die of the heat there."⁷¹

⁶⁹ A Mère Marie, 10 juillet, 1851. S.M.W.A.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE NEW MOTHERHOUSE

"Notwithstanding the trials through which it has pleased Our Lord that we should pass, He has deigned to bless our Congregation."

MOTHER THEODORE

ALL during the oppressive summer of 1851 the amassing of essential building materials for the new motherhouse went on. After the brickyard was established near enough to the proposed site to obviate expensive hauling, the manufacture of the brick under the Ross brothers progressed steadily. The first kiln of brick was burned on July 9, feast of Our Lady of Prodigies. Three months later on October 10, though storms and rain had delayed the work, Mother Theodore could record that an adequate supply was now in readiness. For this she had paid in recurring amounts of three and four hundred dollars all summer. By November materials to the value of some six thousand dollars had been assembled despite a disappointment with the lime of which the first supply was badly prepared and proved to be useless.

The contract with the mason, Mr. Blood of Terre Haute, had already been signed when the beautiful autumn weather yielded to a sharp frost, and torrents of winter rain postponed all building operations till spring. The estimated cost of constructing the motherhouse, "and especially the chapel," Mother Theodore placed at ten thousand dollars, for which, with her usual confidence she relied upon Divine Providence. They were still the children of Providence, as Sister Saint Francis Xavier so often remarked. "We are going to be in pressing need for our new house," wrote Mother Theodore in November to Sister Basilide at Madison. "The carpenter asks thirty-five hundred dollars for the work alone without even furnishing a nail. Imagine what will be needed for the whole, not a cent less than ten thousand dollars. . . . But after all, we are daughters of Divine Providence."¹

The Foundress knew Bishop de Saint-Palais's generous heart and kindly intentions, but when she reflected upon the mounting number of orphans in the two institutions at Vincennes, she feared that this one item alone, their maintenance, would swallow up all the funds he could gather in France. Accordingly, she turned every activity of her fertile mind toward meeting the inevitable debt as much as possible from the Community resources. Her typical French ingenuity stood her in good stead in all these circumstances, and in July, 1851, she could write to France, "We are now well ahead in paying off our debts; in fact, we might say that we have no more debts. We still owe fifteen hundred dollars to one person in Madison, but it is for property which we purchased and which is worth more than that amount. The other debts are of little consequence."² As

¹ *J. and L.*, p. 324.

² A Mère Marie, 10 juillet, 1851. S.M.W.A.

she toiled on the preliminaries to building, a long-cherished project began to take shape in her mind. The inward resolution registered years before when she knelt, struck silent with grief and dismay, in the miserable cabin where the Sisters found the Blessed Sacrament on the evening of their arrival, to erect, when and as they could, a fitting home for their Sacramental Lord, now appeared to be taking the form of a possible realization. In the new motherhouse one apartment was already planned, an adequate chapel as spacious and as worthy as their means could possibly afford. Later a fitting and beautiful church in honor of the Immaculate Queen of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods would be the Foundress's most cherished project—but that was for years to come.

The final events of the school year of 1851 had been announced for the last weeks of July, the usual public examinations followed by the *distribution des prix* and the exhibit of drawing, painting, and needlework. Sister Angelina's illness had made a serious lacuna in the faculty, which increased the duties of the remaining members. Though Sister Mary Cecilia was an excellent musician herself, there was no one at that time in the Community who could adequately replace Sister Angelina. Mother Theodore was therefore engaging a professor from Vincennes, an accomplished pianist and teacher, Mr. Heitz, for the coming year. He was to live with Father Corbe and give his lessons in the little log cabin near the ravine west of Old Providence. His directions and comments to his pupils interpolated with fluent German expletives were to be for many months an audible background to the ordinary round of the school day.

School duties were onerous during the final weeks, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier's constant thoughts of heaven shifted, she said, easily to purgatory in the stifling July heat. Most of the Sisters spent days turning the hay in the large fields while Sister "like a *patraque*"³ sat in the house painting premiums for the pupils. Her poor health was still a constant anxiety to the Foundress. "I fear we shall not keep her long," wrote Mother Theodore to Bishop Bouvier, "and where shall we find anyone to take her place?"⁴ Sister Mary Cecilia was hardly seen from the early morning devotions in the chapel till night during the busy weeks of preparation for the examinations. Father John B. Chassé presided with the usual flattering results, and a satisfactory audience gathered, although a week earlier people had been crossing the river bottom in boats.

The retreat this year for which the missionary Sisters were now assembling was to be given by another of the Kentucky Jesuits, the Reverend Adrian Van Hulst, a Hollander who had been twelve years in America. He had just been succeeded by Father Francis Xavier d'Hoop as president of Saint Aloysius College in Louisville and was to set out for the Osage Indian mission in Kansas the next year. The exercises opened on August 6 with almost sixty persons in the crowded little chapel, and this year the zealous retreat master lengthened each of the four meditations to an hour and a half. On August 14 the triennial election of the two assistants to the Superior General was held with the result that Sister Mary Cecilia was reelected First Assistant and Sister Saint Francis Xavier, Second Assistant and Mistress of Novices, both this time unanimously.

³ This word has already been met.

⁴ 10 juillet, 1850. S.M.W.A.

At the same time Sister Mary Margaret, superior of the girls' orphan asylum, was added to the Particular Council to replace Sister Marie Joseph, and made her promise of fidelity before the assembled Community. On August 15 Father Corbe as Ecclesiastical Superior and Administrator of the diocese received the first vows of six Sisters⁵ and conferred the religious habit upon six postulants.⁶ On the same day Sister Angelina, with only a few more weeks to live, pronounced with great recollection and fervor her perpetual vows to be worn as a diadem in another life.

The missionary Sisters all made almost immediate preparations to depart. The combined Saint Mary's Female School and girls' orphanage at Vincennes now required the services of seven Sisters. They left with the four Sisters for the boys' asylum in the Community wagon with Logan, and Mother Theodore sent Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Mary Cecilia with young Sister Saint Urbain to Vincennes for a few days rest and relaxation. She was always quick to afford a little needed change of air for others although never for herself. A few days later the seven Sisters for Saint Augustine's, Fort Wayne, took the canal boat at Terre Haute, and the six Sisters for Madison boarded the stage to Indianapolis where they made connection with the railroad to Madison. There were no changes in the local superiors. Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer returned to Fort Wayne and Sister Basilide to Madison. Sister Mary Margaret had been threatened with blindness but was now better and remained in charge of the girls' asylum and Sister Joachim of the boys'. Sister Anastasie with her three companions returned to Terre Haute and Sister Agnes with two Sisters to Jasper, later than the others, "detained by a sick horse," as Mother Theodore noted.

Sister Angelina was now at death's door. On September 5 she received Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, and two days later she was no more. Mother Theodore's loving heart overflowed in the pages of the diary:

Our beloved Sister Angelina left this world for heaven at six in the evening after an illness of three years, the last phase of her malady lasting from June 10. She died in the sentiments of filial confidence in which she had spent her life. Orphaned in her infancy, she had been in the house of God from the age of eighteen months. For the eight years she has been in our Congregation she rendered important service and showed herself extremely solicitous for the welfare of our Congregation and in times of difficulty truly devoted, and that at the expense of her affections and her own interests. She was all this time a good Sister of Providence, and her loss is keenly felt, by none however so deeply as by me. O my God, place in your holy Paradise this innocent and pure soul which you kept with so much care and love. You loved this child.⁷

The beautiful sentiments of faith and confidence of the dying Sister, her gratitude to God and her abandonment to His holy will had greatly edified the Community. "Some of her last words touched us deeply," recorded the Foundress in her circular letter to the missions. "Oh, how

⁵ Sister Bonaventure, Sister Clara, Sister Clotilde, Sister Felicité, Sister Saint John, and Sister Martina, all of whom had been one or two years on mission.

⁶ Sister Josephine, Sister Elizabeth, Sister Roseann, Sister Mary James, Sister Agatha, and Sister Melanie.

⁷ Diary.



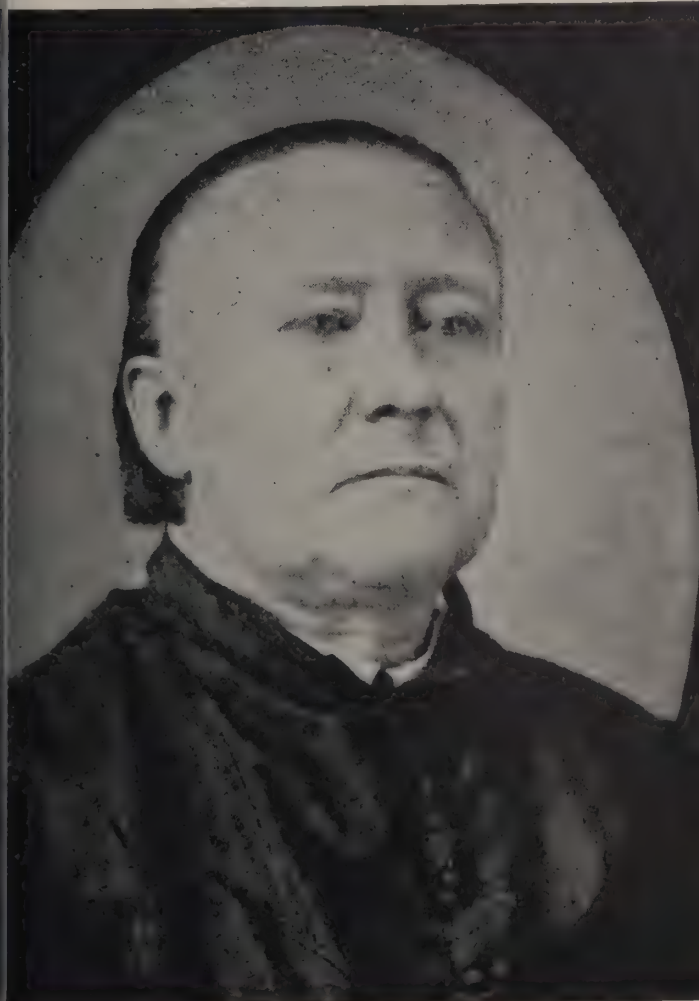
JULIAN BENOIT
1808-1885

For forty-five years pastor of Saint Augustine's Church, Fort Wayne.



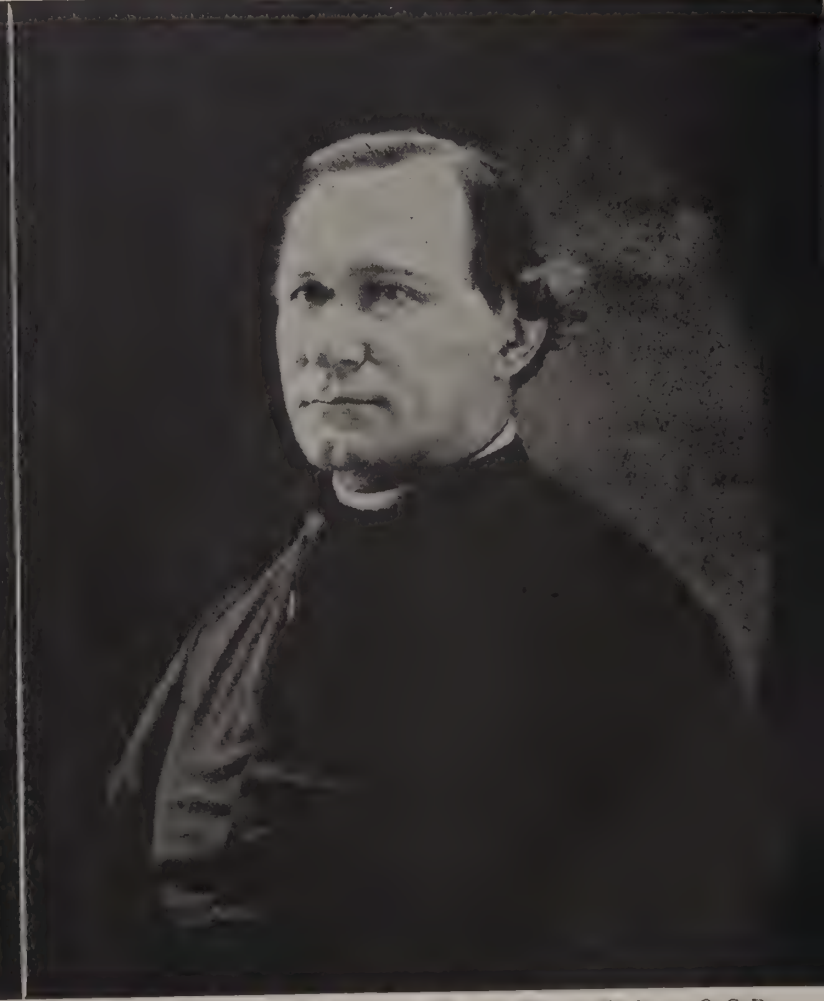
SIMON PETIT LALUMIERE
1804-1857

Pastor for fifteen years of Saint Joseph's Church, Terre Haute.



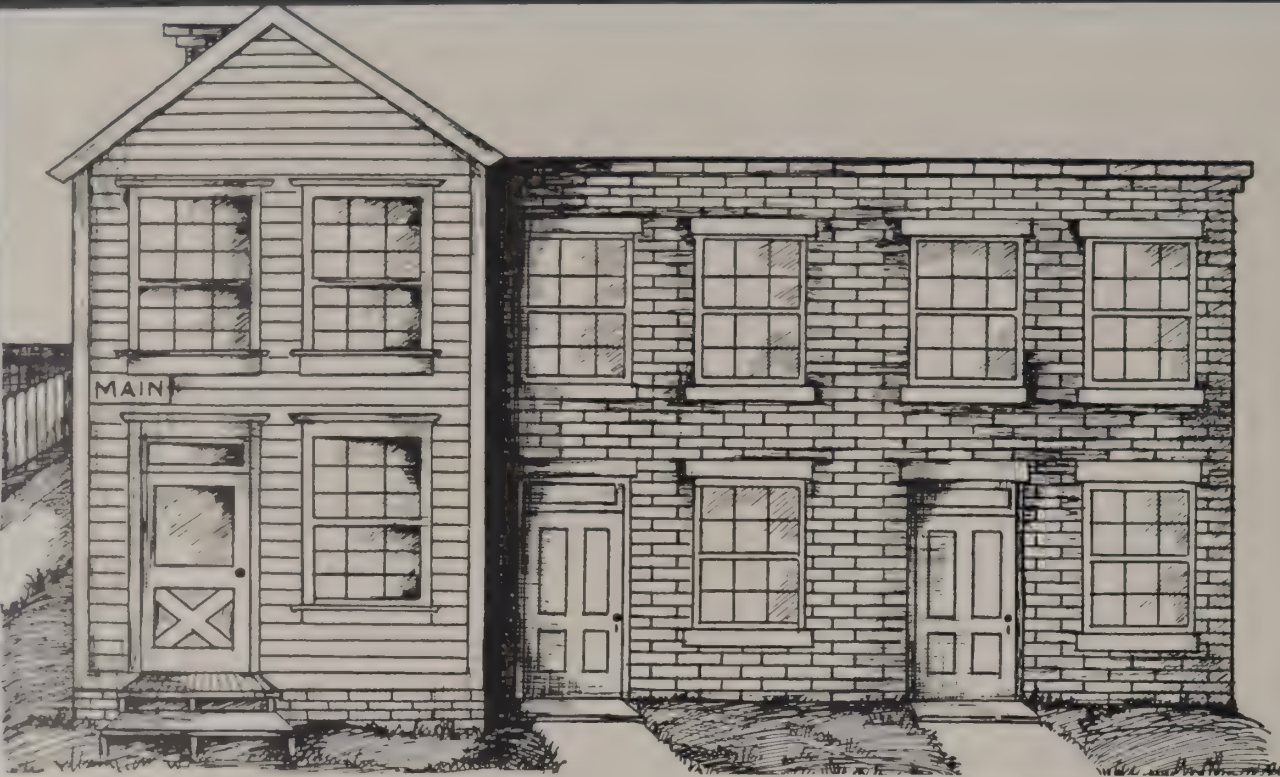
HIPPOLYTE DUPONTAVICE
1810-1874

For twenty-seven years pastor of Saint Michael's Church, Madison.



Courtesy Rev. Albert Kleber, O.S.B.
JOSEPH KUNDEK
1810-1857

First Pastor of Saint Joseph's Church, Jasper.



(Above)
 Drawn by Sister Georgiana from oral traditions

SAINT MARY'S FEMALE SCHOOL
 VINCENNES, 1843-1848

The site, Fifth and Market Street, later changed to Main, was long known as the "Bishop's Block."

(Right)
 From a contemporary lithograph

SAINT AUGUSTINE'S ACADEMY, FORT WAYNE
 after the erection of the Jefferson Street wing in 1867. The original building outlined in black.

(Below)
 SAINT JOSEPH'S ACADEMY, TERRE HAUTE
 The original structure of 1849 outlined in white.



good our Lord is!' We replied, 'You will understand His goodness much better when you have quitted this body of sin.' 'Oh, Mother,' she said, 'I understand it even now.'"⁸

School had now resumed at the academy, and Mr. Heitz was giving music lessons to both pupils and Sisters and in addition teaching Sister Victoire to play the organ. Aware of the need for a finished musician, Bishop de Saint-Palais was making renewed efforts to secure in Europe some talented recruits for the Community. His first attempts were however discouraging. His quest for alms for the diocese, for priests and postulants were all at first equally unsuccessful, and he sent a request to the Community through Father Corbe for special prayers for the success of his mission. His visit to zealous and hospitable Belgium was however much more satisfactory, and it was there in the most generous country of Europe eventually that he secured the musician for whom the Community had been praying. In the great Catholic families of the Belgian aristocracy, so high-minded and so profoundly religious, the Bishop was welcomed everywhere, and they disputed with one another the honor of receiving him and hearing his account of his needy diocese. Several of these noblemen gave generously to this worthy cause. The Bishop was both gratified and encouraged especially as he expected aid also from Catholic Brittany, which he was reserving to the last place upon his itinerary.

Thus far no direct word had reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from him, although he had now been gone nearly six months. "It is truly surprising that Monseigneur does not give us a sign of life from France," wrote Mother Theodore to Sister Basilide in November.⁹ The first letter from the Bishop to the Community was received only early in January, 1852. His permanent address had now shifted from the residence of one of his brothers at Pont d'Assou, near Lavaur in the department of Tarn to Paris. The Community learned of his activities also from another source:

Your worthy Bishop passed several days with me at the close of November, wrote Bishop Bouvier to Mother Theodore. From here [Le Mans] he went to Ruillé and thence to Paris by way of Tours. We were all pleased with him. We conversed of you and your Sisters. He loves you all very much and founds great hopes for the good of his diocese upon your Congregation. . . . In truth, my dear daughter, what you tell me of your house, your academy, your postulants, your establishments, your projects for building, your hopes of meeting your expenses, all this is wonderful. Why cannot I go for a little while to see these marvels? . . . Monseigneur de Vincennes has delivered the nice things which you gave him for me and for which I am very grateful. We have often spoken of you while tasting at my table your singular maple sugar which everyone finds good.

The Bishop added a few words on Louis Napoleon's recent *coup d'état*:

You know what Louis Napoleon has done to save us from the threatening crisis of 1852.¹⁰ Your Americans will probably not bless his memory. His manner of governing, we must acknowledge, does not approach the liberty so much prized

⁸ *J. and L.*, p. 321.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

¹⁰ The *coup d'état* of December 2, 1851, by which he seized the government of France. One year later he was proclaimed Emperor of the French.

in the United States. That religion may prosper and souls be saved, that is all we ask.¹¹

Bishop de Saint-Palais had therefore by that time already made the long anticipated visits to Le Mans and to the motherhouse at Ruillé. Mother Theodore learned later with what gracious hospitality he had been received by Mother Mary and the French superiors and how favorably he had impressed them. "The Bishop looks upon Ruillé as one of his homes in France, and counts upon returning there and to Le Mans before he sails for America," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Sister Eudoxie. "I am not surprised that he has pleased you. He is so simple and genuine in his demeanor and his views that he could not fail to be congenial to upright spirits like yours."¹²

His Lordship was making no attempt to secure alms in France for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and of this Mother Theodore heartily approved:

This good Bishop is not attempting to secure alms for us, and I am glad, for I think that by economizing closely we shall be able to be self-supporting. We are going into debt for our new house, but with God's help we shall, in three or four years pay off all that we owe. So, dear Mother, I beg of you, do not deprive yourself in order to give to our establishment in America. We shall receive most gratefully whatever little gifts of friendship you will be pleased to send us, but I really think we shall be able to get along without alms in the future. We have now more than fifty boarding pupils here. Those who pay the full price give us 400 francs not counting extras. Many of the Catholics pay less, but two small sums make one large one.¹³

Monseigneur de Saint-Palais was never given to letter writing. Only a few brief missives, most of them upon purely business matters, are preserved in the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Archives from the twenty-eight years of his episcopate. Most of his orders were given orally, and his projects developed during personal interviews. When he was arranging for the establishment of the orphan asylums, none of the preliminaries was sketched out even tentatively by correspondence. Over impassable roads and across the flooded river bottom this indefatigable young Bishop would travel either on a special trip or on a detour when en route to northern Indiana, to consult or plan with Mother Theodore. She conformed to this procedure and addressed him rarely by correspondence even upon necessary Community affairs. That this often entailed journeys to Vincennes under great hardships in very inclement weather was a circumstance to which her mind seemingly never adverted.

Father Corbe was now in the Bishop's absence as Administrator fully occupied with diocesan affairs and often absent, usually in Vincennes. He had a little time however for the scientific pursuits he loved so much. Many of Father Martin's specimens when received from Vincennes were in very poor condition, especially a very beautiful collection of butterflies. Father Corbe's free moments were therefore devoted to reconditioning the specimens and remounting them. Friends had already become interested in the incipient museum at the academy and contributed generously. In December, 1851, Mr. Prince, Sister Mary Magdalen's brother-

¹¹ A Mother Theodore, 4 février, 1852. S.M.W.A.

¹² 25 mai, 1852. S.M.W.A.

¹³ A Mère Marie, dimanche de Pâques, 1852. S.M.W.A.

in-law, sent a stuffed fox, which was at once added to the growing collection. Father Martin was offering mineralogical specimens and shells from Louisiana,¹⁴ and Father Corbe was planning to send in exchange some of the pretty Wabash river shells. The incessant rains and consequent high water of the spring and summer had however made any shell collecting an impossibility. Photography, then in its infancy, was also one of Father Corbe's hobbies, and he promised Mother Theodore during one of her trips to Madison that if she would bring back from Louisville some hyposulfite of soda he would daguerreotype her on her return.

His personal interests yielded however in the main during the year and a half of the Bishop's absence to more pressing affairs, for the government of the diocese proved a heavy burden particularly onerous to one of his sympathetic and conscientious temperament. He was absent from Saint Mary's sometimes even on Sunday when there was no Mass in the village church, and the Sisters endeavored to supply by reciting the Mass prayers in common in the chapel and chanting Vespers in the afternoon. Though Father Du Pontavice through a mistaken loyalty to Bishop de la Hailandière refused his intimate friendship to the harassed administrator, he could not but appreciate his good will and helped him as much as possible. The most painful experience of a difficult year was connected with the mental collapse of one of the finest and most zealous young priests of the diocese, Father John Contin, upon whom Bishop de Saint-Palais had founded great hopes, and who had been chaplain at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods just after his ordination in 1849 during Father Corbe's absence with the Bishop at the Council of Baltimore. "This last blow . . . made me shed more tears for four days," wrote Father Du Pontavice to Bishop de la Hailandière, "than I have shed for years, and it will touch you too."¹⁵ The patient was then at Vincennes under the care of Dr. Baty, who gave very little hope of his recovery. It was of this week at Vincennes that Father Corbe wrote to Father Martin, "I have never in my life suffered so much."¹⁶

The winter cold was now so severe that the Sisters' teeth chattered in their draughty convent even close to the fire. An old cow at the barn was frozen, and the pea fowl died of the cold. By Christmas, however, the weather moderated, and Sisters and villagers gathered under the clear starry skies at the village church for Midnight Mass at which there were one hundred Communions. The last gala occasion of the year for Sisters and girls was always the Foundress's name day, feast of Saint Theodore, celebrated three days after Christmas. In those days of poor transportation and impassable roads few pupils went home for Christmas, and the dinner served by the Sisters at Providence was a traditional part of the celebration. The menu has not come down to us, but no doubt the unusual luxury of a few sips of wine in French fashion was permitted at dessert. This year the feast fell on Sunday, and for the first time the relics of the martyr Saint Theodore were exposed, and the Community "had High Mass, Vespers, and Benediction in the chapel."¹⁷

¹⁴ Corbe à Martin, 25 août, 1851. S.M.W.A.

¹⁵ DuPontavice Collection, 1 juin, 1852. N.D.U.A.

¹⁶ 8 janvier, 1852. S.M.W.A.

¹⁷ Community Diary.

The countryside was by 1851 a very different locality from the lonely wilderness to which the first Sisters had come eleven years earlier. The families of the Catholic Kentucky pioneers, Joseph, Jacob, and Francis Thralls had been joined by others from the North Arm and from across the Ohio. Peter Jarboe and his wife Ann Elder who had arrived from Breckenridge County, Kentucky, in 1841, Hilary Alvey, James Sheerin, and Patrick Curley from Ireland bought farms, and a number of other Irish settlers gathered round the church. Walter Reed, a Virginian by birth, had met and married his wife Susan Elder in Kentucky. They settled on a farm west of the village of Saint Mary's and the family except the father were Catholics. The Friel family from Pennsylvania consisting of Mrs. Margaret Friel and her two daughters, Margaret and Grace, were among the pioneer residents. Mary Friel, who had married Jacques Roquet, had accompanied him to Evansville, where he achieved considerable reputation as an architect and builder before his early death there. The Cambron family were Catholic Kentuckians who are said to have altered the form of their old Scottish Presbyterian name of Cameron as other Catholic English and Scottish families did, to mark their fidelity to the ancient faith. One of the Cambron daughters, Theresa, entered the novitiate, received the religious habit in 1851, and as Sister Melanie gave sixty-two of her sixty-eight years in religion to the devoted service of the orphans at Highland and Saint Ann's, a unique career.

The village school carried on in different localities on the Community property gathered the children of the pioneers to the number of some twenty or thirty every day, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier instructed them in Christian doctrine twice a week on Sunday and Thursday. The old Royaumont Bible history in which she had taught her little brothers and sisters to read at home in France, she now employed to initiate the children of the village to the story of the Chosen People. On Sunday after Vespers she took them to her room where they crowded round her little writing table,¹⁸ and using a long knitting needle as a pointer, she explained the illustrations in a manner suited admirably to the age and intelligence of her hearers.¹⁹ The Jarboe, Alvey, and Thralls boys and Thomas Butler²⁰ were among the pupils. Little Charles Simeon Jarboe, six years old, was her favorite pupil, and young as he was, aroused her admiration by his zeal to help his less capable schoolfellows. "My little Simeon," she wrote, "not yet six years old and already a catechist." She rewarded him by the gift of a little pair of yellow beads. Another who never forgot her kindness was Lorenzo Thralls whom she had prepared for his First Communion at the age of twenty.

The boys were still as always her preferred ones, although she acknowledged that some of them were prodigals. "To know when Sister Saint Francis Xavier should be prepared for the last Sacraments," said Mother Theodore laughingly, "I need only say to her, 'There is a boy downstairs who wishes to speak to you.' If she does not reply, 'Let him come up,' then I shall have no doubt that she is very sick and we must at once send for

¹⁸ Still preserved.

¹⁹ Sister Mary Ursula's notes.

²⁰ Sister Theresa Mary's father.

the priest.”²¹ First Communion, then generally held in May, was a never-to-be-forgotten occasion when after a three days retreat the First Communicants were entertained by Mother Theodore with a generous feast day dinner of French delicacies before their long ride home. The village seems to have been more populous then than now.

Now we have quite a little country town at Saint Mary's, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier in 1851. Formerly the entire congregation or population could fit into Father Corbe's parlor. At present his church, which accommodates four hundred persons is too small. We have in the village a post office, two little inns, three or four stores, wheelwrights, coopers, carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, cabinet makers, etc. Our assiduous care for the propagation of the Faith does not prevent our interesting ourselves in the material progress of the country in which we live.²²

Most of these people, but not all, were Catholics. The Community shoemaker, Glockner, had a Lutheran wife of deep-rooted convictions. She fell very ill, however, and to the joy of the Sisters was received into the Church on her deathbed. Other striking conversions from time to time were due in many cases to the prayers and zeal of Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Sister Olympiade also exercised a widespread apostolate, threading the woods on an old white horse to visit the sick in weather which no doctor would brave, and many a dying child received Baptism from her hands. On one occasion a baby at the point of death baptized by Sister Saint Francis Xavier with the permission of its Protestant parents, suddenly when the water touched its head opened its little blue eyes and began unaccountably to get better.²³ Catholics were attracted by the religious atmosphere of the countryside, and many of the men found at the convent a market for their farm products and steady employment for themselves in the extensive building project which now for years occupied the Community.

Remote as was the village of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, it was not too retired to experience an acute attack of the gold fever which swept over the country after the first gold was discovered in January, 1848, on Johann Sutter's ranch in California. Twenty men, almost the entire able-bodied population, had left the village for California in April, 1850. The gold mania gradually penetrated even to the academy as parents and friends of the pupils were joining the rush. Morse's telegraph was in complete operation between Terre Haute and Cincinnati by August, 1850, bringing news from every corner of the country. Telegrams began to be exchanged in emergencies between the motherhouse and the missions in 1851, and it was by a *dépêche télégraphique* that Mother Theodore learned of Sister Marie Joseph's death in Fort Wayne. As usual strange ideas regarding the telegraph were abroad. When the wires were strung between Terre Haute and Indianapolis, some of the farmers had sought for the line to pass over their acreage so they might climb the poles and intercept the news as it passed along. Father Sorin, his resources at Notre Dame crippled by a disastrous fire, had sent some of his Brothers to the gold fields, but without success. Edward W. McGaughey, the Indiana Whig Member of

²¹ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 295.

²² *L'Indiana*, p. 215.

²³ Sister Mary Ursula's notes.

Congress, had joined the rush and like so many others died of fever and exhaustion in San Francisco without ever reaching the gold fields.

The excitement in Indiana was incredible and lasted for several years. As early as January, 1849, a company of fifty men had been organized in Terre Haute to leave for California from Independence, Missouri, between April first and tenth, to reach the gold region in ten days. Each man's equipment included two mules, a rifle, knives, powder, and provisions. Embarrassed debtors were welcoming an easy escape from their obligations. One promoter was offering to take emigrants to California at \$150 per person, furnishing everything but the tent, and forty-seven ships were reported at the New York piers ready to start round Cape Horn. Wives and children followed before many months. Then came in many cases the inevitable aftermath of failure and disappointment.

Thomas Fearn, the Terre Haute confectioner, whose three children had been pupils at the academy since 1846, had been among the first to set out for California followed later by his wife. Of the three children, Eliza,²⁴ the eldest, was now thirteen, looking forward eagerly to entering the novitiate in a few years. One day toward the end of 1851 a notice of Thomas Fearn's death appeared in the Terre Haute papers though neither the children nor Mother Theodore had received direct word. Finally a letter from the poor mother revealed her situation, grief-stricken at the death of her husband and stranded in California without funds to return. "Mother Theodore thought best to tell us," wrote Sister Mary Ursula many years later, "lest the news should reach us from the other pupils. She came to the academy herself, met us in the parlor and there communicated the sad news to us with a heart full of love and sympathy." "God is the Father of orphans, and we are their mother," wrote the Foundress, and accordingly she took entire charge of the children till their mother was able to care for them. "Our dear father being now dead," continued Sister Mary Ursula, "Mother Theodore's thoughts were directed to our future interests and welfare. She arranged for us two little [older] girls to go to Providence twice a week to learn plain sewing under the direction of Sister Mary." In 1854 their mother returned, took the younger children with her to California, and reluctantly permitted Eliza to enter the novitiate.

The work of gathering building materials had gone on steadily during the winter when the lessened labor of the farm liberated the workmen. In January the hauling of stone from the Pottsville quarry continued over the frozen roads which a few warm days would quickly turn into morasses. This actually happened at the end of the month. "It is as warm as in summer," noted Mother Theodore in the diary, and, inevitable result, "One can hardly walk for the mud." In mid-February the hoarse roar of steamboats on the Wabash echoing through the woods announced the return of spring, and a few days later the carpenter, John Warner of Terre Haute and his apprentices, arrived at Saint Mary's bringing the materials to build the carpenter shop for planing and preparing the doors and windows and the extensive interior woodwork which at that time went into all houses. Friends were contributing small sums as they could to help meet the growing weekly pay roll. Generous Father Benoit offered fifty

²⁴ Later Sister Mary Ursula.

dollars at one time, three hundred at another. The missions too were carefully husbanding their little surpluses to send home. Early in March Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer could send two hundred dollars. Sister Agnes and Sister Anastasie made up a hundred between them, and Sister Basilide sent two hundred. Later they doubled and trebled their first gifts. Various entries of sums "From Monseigneur" in Mother Theodore's accounts show that his promised yearly offering toward the new motherhouse was being taken care of in his absence. The Foundress was borrowing also, a hundred dollars here, another hundred there, six hundred the largest sum recorded, all in an effort to meet the inexorable weekly wage account.

Sometimes her courage almost failed her. "We are beginning to build a house which will cost more than fifty thousand francs, a terrible undertaking for little persons like us. I feel my courage slipping away at the thought."²⁵ "The house will be very large and very fine when it is finished," wrote Father Corbe early in June to Father Martin, "but when will it be paid for? Of that we know nothing, for we have no money."²⁶ The new convent was however not a large construction, 110 x 65 x 40, and would seem even more modest today. A week or so after the carpenters arrived in February the Foundress turned as usual to the Immaculate Patroness of the Community asking in view of the risk involved, for fifty pupils at the academy as a sign that she might "without rashness proceed to build our chapel and motherhouse."

The Queen of Heaven answered at once. On February 22 they had fifty-one students. "We have made a general Communion in thanksgiving today, the twenty third," the Foundress recorded, and she started the next day with renewed ardor upon the plans and obligations connected with the building. The stone hauled from the quarry was to be cut and dressed near the proposed building site. All this work she must oversee herself. Of the two expert builders who had erected the village church and the academy wings in 1846, Marcile had died of the cholera in Evansville the previous year, and Jacques Roquet was also in Evansville sinking under the malady which carried him off in the prime of life. The Community was building according to a plan drawn by Marcile, but no architects or builders were to be had. As Father Corbe was without experience in this line of work, the main burden of initiative and responsibility fell upon the Foundress. On Saint Joseph's day she made the first payment to the carpenters and signed a contract with Francis Thralls to make the lathes.

All day long now the sound of the plane and of hammer and saw mingled with the merry laughter of the children at play and the regular chime of the convent bell calling the Sisters to prayer. The work advanced rapidly all during the bright spring days. Hauling of stone and lumber was done by Jacob Thralls, Hilary Alvey, and the Smith and Curley boys, the Beauchamps and Reeds, and the Vermilions and Leander Thralls were cutting the stone. In mid-May, Our Lady's month, Mr. Blood, the mason, came to mark the excavation site.

Too wise and too large-minded to build in a scrimped or meager fashion, Mother Theodore was planning a spacious convent capable of accommo-

²⁵ A Mère Marie, dimanche de Pâques, 1852. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ 8 juin, 1852. S.M.W.A.

dating the growing Community for many years. This, was evidently not the time for small or narrow views. The location had been selected however long in advance, the cleared space where the hollyhocks and woodbine, the pinks and sunflowers had encircled the vegetable garden to the north of the old convent and on the exact emplacement of the present motherhouse. The house was to be a substantial three-story brick with roomy basement, severely plain both exteriorly and interiorly but adequate to its destination. These were her plans. Later she was to regret a certain note of simple elegance which invested the building almost from the beginning. On May 24, feast of Our Lady of Help of Christians, the first sod was turned. The joy which filled Mother Theodore's great heart found expression two days later in a long letter to Mother Mary:

Since we have been on this side of the ocean, whenever anything extraordinary has happened to us, my first thought is usually for God, my second for you. My heart feels the need of sharing with you both its joys and griefs. This time it is with a deep feeling of joy that I am writing.

Last Monday, the day consecrated to honor our beloved Blessed Mother under the title Help of Christians, a feast restricted, I believe, to America, the excavation for the foundation of our future chapel and house was begun. Five men are working with machines and six horses which quickly carry off the earth to a little distance. We wish to have a basement under the entire house, six feet beneath the floor timbers. It will cost three hundred dollars more, but will give solidity to the building, and will assure coolness in summer and prevent frost in winter. Weather permitting, we shall have the cornerstone laid on the last day of this beautiful month of May, although I fear that the rain may interfere with our plans.

I feel much less uneasy at present at having no one to direct the work than when I wrote to our good Mother St. Charles a few weeks ago. God knows we have no alternative, and as it is for Him and for His servants we are building, He will assist us. You will pray for us, will you not, my Mother? He has facilitated the work thus far; we have only quiet and industrious workmen, and a continuance of such circumstances will give us much to be grateful for; we have, however, one terrible obstacle to the work—water and mud, and great breaks of frightful size in the road from here to Terre Haute.²⁷

Luther Keller received a hundred dollars for excavating the foundations. The masons began work at once with some forty men employed. Progress on the building was steady and satisfactory all summer.

Not however till June 13, feast of Corpus Christi, then a holyday of obligation elsewhere in the United States though not in the Diocese of Vincennes,²⁸ was the cornerstone solemnly blessed by Father Corbe. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed all day. The Community and the academy pupils left the church in procession after Vespers to the sound of the Litany of Loretto, preceding Father Corbe. Father Lalumiere pronounced an eloquent and learned discourse before a large group of spectators. "My God, grant that all those who will live and die within these sacred walls may be good religious, saints,"²⁹ was the Foundress's prayer. With-

²⁷ Mother Theodore à Mère Marie, 26 mai, 1852. S.M.W.A.

²⁸ By the decrees of the Vincennes Synod of 1844, four holydays only were to be observed by special arrangements with the Holy See: Christmas, the Ascension, the Assumption, and All Saints.

²⁹ Community Diary.

in the stone located at the southeast corner of the building a box was placed containing an explanatory document in Latin by Father Corbe with the sacred initials A.M.D.G., and the names of the Holy Family, special patrons of the Congregation. Fine weather continued to facilitate the masons' work, and Father Corbe noted that same month that the walls were nearly five feet high. On July 2 Mother Theodore recorded in the diary that the beams for the second floor were being placed. Three weeks later the third floor was begun, and the Madison Sisters who arrived that day saw a spectacle which gladdened their hearts, the tall walls of their new home, now two-thirds finished. It was in truth then to be their last summer in the inconvenience and heat of the old Thralls convent.

This had been a busy year with the building activities and expense added to the usual regime, nevertheless the convent, the school, the farm, went on as before. "I have bought a cow, said to be very good, for twenty dollars," the Foundress had written in the diary on February 14. "Her name is Spot, and her little calf is called Bona." Despite the added duties and responsibilities of supervising the building nothing was neglected, the monthly examinations of the academy pupils, the Foundress's voluminous correspondence, the needs of the missions, her annual tours of visitation, the care of the farm, potato planting and sheep shearing, and later in the summer harvesting the hay and oats, and gathering the fruit.

The month of Saint Joseph and especially his feast day on March 19 had been celebrated with more than usual fervor and confidence. So many urgent needs there were to be recommended to this great saint. At Easter time fifteen of the pupils who lived in Terre Haute or the vicinity spent the holiday at their homes though by far the greater number remained at the academy. A short time later a panorama of Milton's *Paradise Lost* was shown for them. On Spy Wednesday Mother Theodore noticed in her mail a letter with the Ruillé-sur-Loir postmark. From the address she saw it was from the beloved French superior, Mother Saint Charles, and opening it she found an enclosure for Sister Saint Francis Xavier, as she thought, from the mistress of novices at Ruillé, Sister Eudoxie. So few and so rare were the letters from the French motherhouse that both Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Francis Xavier were overjoyed, but they agreed to seal the precious letter again and in union with the Passion of Our Lord offer the sacrifice of not reading it till Easter. Only on Easter day after High Mass did they open and read the cherished letter with news of the never-to-be-forgotten cradle of their religious life at Ruillé. The Sisters had made their monthly retreat on Holy Thursday before the Blessed Sacrament exposed.

I was left at home during Holy Week, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Mother Mary, while the others went to church. I confess that I still find it easier to be Mary than Martha, for although my only task is to keep up the fire under the kettle, I am often humiliated on the return of our Sister cooks. You fathomed me well, my dear Mother, when you said I was capable only of loving. I fail in everything else. Oh, if I could only turn all the tenderness of my heart toward the sole Infinite Good! If I could only make Him loved by my dear Sisters the novices. There are some among them who have great courage and great good will. . . . Sister Mary Cecilia is quite zealous with her pupils. She gives them good instruc-

tions when she can, and I supply for what she cannot do. I have five of her pupils now to prepare for Baptism.³⁰

Four received this great Sacrament on Pentecost Sunday, and there were seven First Communions.

On Easter Tuesday Mother Theodore, accompanied this time by Sister Saint Urbain, set out on the long trip north to Fort Wayne. They crossed the flooded river bottom "almost swimming," and this year traveled by steamboat to Lafayette where they transferred to the canal reaching their destination on Friday morning. Returning they made better time. Accompanied by Father Benoit, they left Fort Wayne on April 27 at two P.M., stopped at Huntington for Margaret Buchanan,³¹ at Logansport for two little pupils for the academy, and at Lafayette for a crippled orphan boy whom Father Michael Clarke was sending to the asylum at Vincennes, and reached Terre Haute at ten P.M., on the twenty-ninth.

A few weeks later Father Lalumiere preached twice daily in the village church for three days for the jubilee asked of the Catholic world by Pope Pius IX on his return from Gaeta to beg the Divine mercy for the Church then so bitterly persecuted in Italy. Father Corbe as administrator announced the jubilee and fixed the time for the Vincennes diocese in a long circular issued on May 18, 1852. In addition to the usual reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist at any time from June 6 to July 6, three visits to the church with prayers for the Holy See, a day's fast, and alms according to one's means were the requisites specified for gaining the plenary indulgence. The orphans were suggested as a meritorious object of the required alms. The jubilee "has done much good at Saint Mary's," remarked Mother Theodore.³²

About this time on June 2 occurred another of those remarkable, almost miraculous answers to prayers which were so frequent in the life of the Foundress of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Francis Xavier were returning from a business trip to Terre Haute in what Father Corbe called the "bogu " ³³ drawn by "Charlie that wicked horse," often unmanageable. Sister Saint Francis described the occurrence next day in one of her inimitable letters to her family in France:

"Out of the depths I have cried unto Thee, O Lord." Mother Theodore and I had just alighted on this passage in our office. The evening was calm and tranquil, the moonbeams glittered through the branches of the tall trees in our forest. We were crossing the first bridge on the road from Terre Haute when I noticed that the horse was backing. I jumped out at once, and saw that but a few inches of plank separated the wheels of the carriage from the ravine below. "Mother, Mother!" I screamed, "jump out!" She tried to do so, but it was too late; in a second carriage, horse, Mother, all had disappeared over the precipice, and I was all alone on the bridge, crying, "O my Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, come, save our Mother!"

Descending the ravine, I saw the horse on his back, the carriage upside down, and between the wheels and the horse's feet our poor Mother's head. But she was still alive and asked me to call for help. Though I looked for it from heaven only, I ran,

³⁰ A M re Marie, lundi de P ques, 1852. S.M.W.A.

³¹ Later Sister Saint Felix.

³² Community Diary.

³³ buggy.

calling. A young man I had not seen before was in a wagon, about a hundred paces off, and he came at once, though the time seemed longer. A single movement of the horse could have killed Mother. How I clasped her in my arms when she was half out from under the carriage! She had to show me the danger I was in between the legs of the horse, which was still on his back.

But how I thanked God, the Blessed Virgin, and Saint Joseph! Mother was as composed as if she were coming from the chapel, and it was not until after some time that she felt any emotion. When I was calling for help I offered our Lord one of Mother's limbs at least, but when the young man had raised the wheel up over her head I diminished my offering and cried, "My God, my God, take the horse!" But we had no need of a ram to redeem our dear victim; the carriage and my veil alone have paid for all.

Why and how I jumped out upon the bridge I do not know, for I did not foresee the danger; but I knew the horse was a vicious one, and that Mother feared nothing so much as a horse that backs. It was on her account I jumped out of the carriage, as I laughingly told her. If both of us had fallen, it is probable one would have been killed, for between the wheels there was room only for Mother's head. How I thanked God for having spared her the suffering I endured on her account! She would never have believed I could live through it. You prayed for her that day—it was the First Friday of the month. God heard you and preserved a Mother and a friend for our Community and family.

Will you be kind enough to have a Mass of thanksgiving offered, either at Lorette or Nazareth, in remembrance of our Lord's protection? You would shudder could you but see the spot where this distressing yet consoling accident occurred. I shall not attempt to describe this bridge, which has no parapet, etc.; but those who next day saw the wreck of our carriage could not understand how Mother Theodore was not killed, falling from such a height. If when tempted I should pray as I did then, never should I sin. What confidence I had! Mother Theodore told me that when the young man came up I exclaimed in French, "Our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist has saved Mother!" but I know not what I said. It was nearly eleven P. M. when we arrived at Saint Mary's where Mother was bled. She still has bruises from the fall. I myself was a little hurt in jumping, but that is nothing, and to prove my gratitude to God I am going to try to be very good and not lose one moment of time.³⁴

The locality where this accident took place was one of the deep ravines since filled which used to cut the Terre Haute road at the foot of the old "yellow hill," so called from its clayey soil, from the crest of which one now has the first glimpse of the beautiful white stone Renaissance church tower of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The school year was now drawing to a close. On July 2 Mother Theodore sent out her circular inviting the missionary Sisters to the annual retreat. "Our Lord knows our wants, and He loves us. He has new favors to bestow upon us, and it is through the channel of the retreat that He will communicate them," she wrote.³⁵ Two days later she refused to continue to the academy pupils a permission which had been allowed them to celebrate the Fourth of July by dinner at the Prairie House in Terre Haute. The previous year the English traveler Richard Beste had seen them there, a group of young ladies dressed in white with white ribbons in their hair

³⁴ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 341.

³⁵ *J. and L.*, p. 336; Letter Circular, July 3, 1852.

who came from a large convent school called Saint Mary-of-the-Wood [sic]. This was their greatest holiday in the year, the only day on which they were allowed, except when they went home, to pass beyond the spacious enclosure of their convent grounds. On this day all the pupils and their teachers formed different parties and visited some place in the neighborhood.³⁶

Mr. Beste with his ready observation of the talents of pupils from the "nuns' schools" singled out "two rather elegant girls who danced and played the piano and sang very well." He thought nevertheless this

a very strange way of keeping a holiday in a young ladies' school, in a school in which I see that the charges for each boarder including all extras (such as French, Latin, drawing, painting, music, etc.), amount to twenty guineas a session.

Perhaps others felt the same. In any case the young ladies were hospitably entertained this year on the Fourth by Joseph Thralls at his farm some two miles from Saint Mary's.

Mr. George P. Buell, a prominent attorney of Lawrenceburg, Indiana, conducted the public examinations on August 3 and 4, and delivered an address which was so well received by the large audience that Mother Theodore had it printed afterwards in pamphlet form. Mr. Buell, whose daughter Jeannette later entered the Church and the Community,³⁷ belonged to a distinguished family. His nephew, General Don Carlos Buell, fought with great success in the Mexican War and played a prominent part in the Civil War, especially in the battles of Shiloh and Perryville. George Buell's sons were West Point graduates, and one was killed in Custer's Massacre. Sister Ann Cecilia's brothers followed her into the Church. All but five of the pupils left at once after Commencement. Perhaps those who were disappointed on July 4 were consoled by the "sprightly dance on the evening of August 6 at the Brown Hotel in Terre Haute" reported by the *Wabash Courier*:

A large number of young ladies fresh from the examination at Saint Mary's and on their return home with parents and friends arrived in the evening. Mr. Brown's dining room was appropriated, young gentlemen were levied upon, and three musicians from Lafayette and two of our place were in requisition. The canal packet was in waiting for a few hours. Everything went off gaily till one o'clock. The company then dispersed, some at once for the packet, and others for the railroad train this morning.³⁸

The missionary Sisters had all now been at Saint Mary's for some days. Forty-four Sisters and eighteen postulants were to make the retreat as four Sisters were detained with the orphans in Vincennes and two others as usual in Fort Wayne. The exercises opened with Benediction and the *Veni Creator* at half past five on August 8, though the Jesuit retreat master arrived only at eight. In those days of uncertain transportation delays were inevitable. Another Hollander was to give the exercises, one who however later became very well and favorably known to the Community, Father Arnold Damen. The American Jesuits had found by experience that none of the Europeans learned the language and conformed

³⁶ Richard Beste, *The Wabash*, vol. 2, p. 87.

³⁷ Sister Ann Cecilia.

³⁸ August 7, 1852.

to the customs and spirit of America with the facility manifested by the Dutch and Belgians. A special effort, largely through the instrumentality of Father Peter de Smet, was made to recruit them for the Jesuit missions in the United States.

Father Damen in 1852 was the energetic and zealous pastor of Saint Francis Xavier's Church in Saint Louis, and had not yet embarked upon his later extraordinary career in the field of parochial missions. His tall, portly figure with handsome head and dignified bearing, his earnest words motivated by a straightforward pursuit of God's glory and deep personal piety made a profound impression.³⁹ The heat and crowded quarters were hardly noticed. Everyone knew and recognized with a grateful heart that this retreat was indeed the last in their old convent. These were the days of blood and thunder sermons. Father Damen later said of himself that he preached with great vehemence "for the more the preacher thunders from the pulpit the more the Irish and the Americans like him."⁴⁰

Father Francis X. Weninger, the renowned German missionary, tells of the moans and sobs of contrition from his auditors. One aged Sister recalls hearing Father Weninger call out "Hell, hell" from the pulpit of Holy Family Church in Chicago. An old woman among his hearers was not impressed. "I would rather have one yell from Father Dimon [sic]," she remarked, "than all the praiching that one can do." Another Sister tells that she and other children at the final sermon of one of Father Damen's missions burst into loud and frightened wailing and were led from the church when the preacher in his description of the eternal punishment awaiting the intemperate and fallen away Catholics raised his powerful voice and punctuated his remarks by resounding blows upon the pulpit. Indiana was the preferred field of activity for both Fathers Damen and Weninger, who exercised their ministry repeatedly in the missions of the state. "The retreat was very fervent," noted Mother Theodore. "The good Father directed us perfectly in the spirit of our Rule."⁴¹

He left after Vespers on the feast of the Assumption, but not without generous words of approval and encouragement. "I believe I told Mother Saint Charles that the Jesuit Father was much pleased with our community," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Mother Mary.⁴² "Father Corbe told me that he was particularly satisfied with Mother Theodore and that he thinks there are very few superiors like her in America." He later interested himself in recommending the Sisters of Providence to the pastors of many parishes where he gave missions, though to the superiors' great regret, no Sisters were available when he asked for them later for his new Holy Family School in Chicago. One Sister, now deceased, remembered him speaking in the chapel at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and raising his hands to heaven with the words, "Oh, I wish all the children of the United States could be taught by the Sisters of Providence!"⁴³

The final events of the vacation had begun with the ceremonies on the

³⁹ Garraghan, *Jesuits of the Middle U. S.*, vol. 2, p. 78.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴¹ Community Diary.

⁴² 15 septembre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

⁴³ Sister Catherine Marie Daly.

feast of the Assumption, the profession of three novices,⁴⁴ the reception of five postulants,⁴⁵ and the customary solemn renovation of vows by all the professed Sisters, Father Corbe officiating in the Bishop's absence. Among the postulants received was a devout young girl from the vicinity of Ferdinand in southern Indiana, Katherine Denning, Sister Saint Ange. Her devout and innocent childhood had brought her many celestial favors. The extraordinary sounds of bells and of chanting which she had heard repeatedly in the woods near her father's farm, presaged the coming of the monks to Indiana and were explained the next year when the Benedictine Fathers from Switzerland bought the site where now rise the extensive buildings of Saint Meinrad's Abbey.

All during the summer the masons and carpenters had been steadily at work, and the walls of the new convent were rising daily higher. Supplies too were bought in increasing amounts of sand, lime, planks, and bricks, also seventy thousand shingles from Toledo and paint for the interior woodwork, all hauled with great trouble to the building site. Before the roofing began, Mother Theodore had the work inspected, and one inside wall had to be done over. On October 1 she made the fourteenth and last payment to Mr. Blood, three hundred and seventy-three dollars, and the masons, their work finished, left Saint Mary's. The carpenters' work went on, and by November the building was all roofed except the cupola. The Foundress now needed a capable and honest plasterer, and she found one in Madison, Mr. John Donahue, with whom a contract was signed early in December, the work at the cost of a thousand dollars, to begin in the spring. With thanksgiving to God the Community made ready to spend its last winter in "the poor cabin," as Bishop de Saint-Palais said, "where they have been shut up so long."

In the meantime the Bishop was continuing in France and Belgium the visits to Bishops and seminaries required by his mission. His sister, Sister D'Aussac, had sent him word by Mother Theodore years earlier that he would find help and encouragement in Europe. "The very sight of a missionary produces enthusiasm," she wrote, and her brother eventually found her words to be true. Father Kundek had left him at Courtrai in Belgium at the end of May not to rejoin him again in Europe. Father Kundek had written to Mother Theodore from Madison that he was convinced that his work in Indiana was finished and that he was leaving in all probability forever. "I recommend to you my little Jasper," he wrote. "Do with it as the Lord will teach you disentangled from any other motive but the love of God."⁴⁶ His old desire for a life of solitude and contemplation had revived. Mother Theodore did everything possible to dissuade him, but "it is high time," he replied, "for me to retire from the world. Pardon me if I say that I know best what is wanting [to] me, as I am after it from the bottom of my heart. God is my Witness."⁴⁷

Mother Theodore was not therefore surprised to hear from him in mid-summer from the famous Benedictine Abbey of Einsiedeln in Switz-

⁴⁴ Sister Mary Antoinette, Sister Emmanuel, Sister Matilda.

⁴⁵ Sister Mary Pauline, the two O'Donald sisters, Sister Mary Ambrose and Sister Mary Angèle, Sister Saint Charles, and Sister Saint Ange.

⁴⁶ July 10, 1851. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

erland where he was spending the octave of Corpus Christi. He was leaving the decision as to his return to Indiana to Our Lady of Hermits, patroness of the famous monastery. He had traveled through Germany in quest of priests, and his future plans included visits to Innsbruck, Winnick, Passau, Vienna, Prague, and Leitmeritz in Bohemia, perhaps also Rome and Jerusalem. He would be back in Indiana, if at all, only in the spring of 1853. His efforts to secure priests for the diocese of Vincennes had been encouraging, and the Abbot of Einsiedeln had promised Bishop de Saint-Palais a colony of his monks for that time. Eventually Father Kundek returned to die five years later among his Germans in his "little Jasper" where the cross above his grave bears the telling words from Genesis, "At the commandment of thy mouth all the people shall obey."

Bishop de Saint-Palais had reserved the last weeks of his stay in Europe for Brittany. En route he visited Bishop de la Hailandière at Triandin near Combours where Father Kundek had earlier paid his respects. Monseigneur de Saint-Palais also sought out the relatives and friends of the French priests and Sisters in Indiana and in September was at Sister Saint Francis Xavier's home at Saint-Servan. His coming had been eagerly awaited by the entire family but especially by Mlle. Elvire Le Fer de la Motte, who after long deliberation and prayer had decided to return to America with the Bishop's party to enter the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Sister Saint Francis Xavier had long prayed that at least one of her five sisters might be called to give herself to God in the Indiana mission, but her thoughts centered upon the two others, Cécile and her godchild, Clementine. Neither Irma nor Mother Theodore when she met the family in France in 1843 gave a thought to Elvire.

Though Martha was Mary's sister, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, it was not of herself that she said, "The Master is come and calls for you." How happy Cécile would have been to hear those good words, she who always preceded Elvire in the ways of piety. From her childhood she sought only God, and from her earliest youth she desired to be called to the religious life, and yet it is the fortunate Elvire who is called, she who never felt this desire.⁴⁸

Twenty-six years of age, charming, gracious, and amiable, Elvire Le Fer de la Motte was also very talented. "You will have a fine musician; you will be able to praise God with her voice; you will have a ready accountant, an artistic skill served by fairy fingers, and finally you will have her heart which knows no limits in its devotedness." Thus did Clementine Le Fer describe to Sister Saint Francis their sister Elvire. "You desired one of your sisters, one who would be humble, zealous, pious, who would have some talent and also some virtue. . . . What you will receive is far beyond your hopes. I can assure you, all your desires are being fulfilled."⁴⁹

The Little Sisters of the Poor had been founded at Saint-Servan some few years before by Jeanne Jugan assisted by the parish priest, Abbé Le Pailleur, and it was to this laudable work that Elvire Le Fer first

⁴⁸ A Mère Marie, 15 septembre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ *L'Indiana*, pp. 278, 279.

thought of consecrating her life. Long before her family or friends had any inkling of her intentions she confided them to Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Their father's death in May, 1852, and Elvire's own poor health raised considerable obstacles. They melted away however in view of Bishop de Saint-Palais's early departure for Indiana, and of the evident advantage of traveling with his party. Nevertheless, when he came to Saint-Servan, although he knew that one of the daughters of the family hoped to return with him, he did not know which one. Elvire did not enlighten him then, but after his departure she spoke to her mother and her family, who consented despite their sorrow, and it was at once decided that she should sail with the Bishop on September 29.

Bishop de Saint-Palais had already secured four other postulants who had assembled at Ruillé and were there awaiting the date set for their departure. Elvire did not join them there. Her time was short, and Abbé Collet, the vicar at Saint-Servan and Elvire's confessor, had decided that her last weeks in view of the recent death of their father, should be spent with her mother. There she could also learn different styles of painting and other kinds of work which would be useful on the mission as Sister Saint Francis Xavier had pointed out. Three of the young women who were at Ruillé the Bishop had met at the convent of Saint Nicholas at Courtrai in Belgium, and one of them was the cultivated musician for whom the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had been praying so fervently.

Miss Mary Marshall, at that time twenty-three years of age, was living in the convent with her mother as a "parlor boarder." She was an Englishwoman born at Solihull, Warwickshire, in 1829, of an old and distinguished Catholic family, a lineal descendant of Earl John Marshall of Dover Castle in King John's reign and on the distaff side of Sir Robert Blomart, who built in the reign of Queen Elizabeth the old manor house of Hatherop noted for its fine collection of portraits of the Stuart sovereigns. The family counted in penal times two nuns "beyond the sea," and a martyr, the monk John Marshall, who was hanged, drawn, and quartered for the Faith. Mary Marshall had finished her education several years previously. She was proficient in French, Latin, and music, and as her younger sister Amelia was still in school, she and her mother remained at Courtrai, while she continued to perfect herself in music and dramatic art under competent masters with a view to the stage. On hearing Bishop de Saint-Palais's eloquent portrayal of the needs of his faraway mission she felt that it was there that God wished her to spend her life. After a farewell visit to England she returned with her mother to Courtrai, entered at Ruillé on May 31, 1852, and spent four months in the novitiate there before embarking for America.

Members also of the group of postulants at Ruillé were two young girls from the industrial school attached to Saint Nicholas Convent in Courtrai, Nathalie and Justine Hermann, born in Flanders and skilled in the art of making Brussels lace. The Bishop saw a lucrative employment for his orphans in lacemaking, which the two young women were quite competent to teach, only to learn at the New York customhouse that its manufacture was prohibited outside of Belgium. Justine Her-

mann eventually returned to Europe, but her younger sister, Sister Saint Antoine, after twenty years in the service of the orphans at Highland, spent the remainder of her long life of eighty-seven years in the care of the sick at the motherhouse where she left a record of unparalleled devotedness.

A young German girl had joined the group at Ruillé, but she became discouraged before the party reached Saint Mary's, and returned to Germany. To them all Mother Theodore had written a serious letter warning them of the hardships and dangers of the missionary career, but welcoming them if they were willing to work and suffer for God. Recruits were badly needed at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, but only those of evident vocation for the missions were encouraged. The spectre of Mlle. Bernard, who had given them so many heartaches ten years earlier, rose up to point a salutary moral. Bishop de Saint-Palais's party of eight persons to sail on September 29 on the *Franklin* now included two seminarians also.

Elvire Le Fer de la Motte arrived to join them at Havre in a strange frame of mind. Exhausted physically and mentally from the journey and the poignant farewells to her deeply loved family, she was a prey to one of those strange revulsions of feeling which sometimes obsess a person embarking on a new career. The bride almost ready to go to the altar experiences an unaccountable fear; the aspirant to religious life is suddenly convinced that she is on the verge of a terrible mistake. Elvire was frozen with fright at the thought of leaving France forever. All her former hesitations regarding her vocation arose with renewed insistence. So acute was her anguish that she actually welcomed the seasickness which robbed her of the power of reflecting upon her misery. Happily the emotional storm she experienced gave way to calm and confidence and repose in the will of God as it always does to the prayerful heart, and the nine-day ocean voyage proved all too short. Her new Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were praying for the travelers and for Elvire in particular.

"At last I have imparted the good tidings to our Community," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to her eldest sister Eugénie. "Tears of joy were shed, and postulants and novices clapped their hands with delight. Elvire, my dear Elvire, will be loved by all."⁵⁰ Mother Theodore had written in the diary many months earlier. "Mlle. Elvire will be here in a short time. O my God, protect her, conduct her to this solitude to love You and make You loved by others. O Mary, be her star. . . ."⁵¹ "O my God, conduct them all. May Thy angels accompany them."⁵² On the feast of the Holy Angels a general Communion was made for the travelers who were then on the ocean. Crossing on the same steamer were Madame Joseph Picquet and her little daughter Louise,⁵³ on their way from Madame Picquet's home in Haguenau, Alsace, to rejoin her husband at the Picquet colony at Sainte Marie, Illinois. Closest ties of affection and gratitude linked the Sisters of Providence from the earliest days to this

⁵⁰ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 353.

⁵¹ February 14, 1852.

⁵² September 22, 1852.

⁵³ Later Mrs. John C. Reitz of Evansville, an Academy pupil of the 1860's.

munificent family who had contributed so generously to their foundation in America.⁵⁴

The Sainte Marie colony had grown and flourished hampered only by the difficulty of procuring German-speaking priests, as not all the settlers were bilingual. In 1850 the Church of the Assumption was finished and blest. The entire Picquet family and a number of relatives had come from Strasbourg, and in 1844 Madame Marie-Josephine-Philippine Willien née Hartrich of Haguenau, with her four-year-old son Léon Jean, joined her brothers Ferdinand and Theodore Hartrich who had been among the earliest members of the *Colonie des Frères*⁵⁵ as were also the families of Charles Guthneck and his father "Père Michel," both of whom spent many years in the employ of the Sisters of Providence at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, as has been noted.

The Hartrichs had been millers and landholders from the early eighteenth century in Alsace. They were cousins of the Picquets, and Madame Willien was a partner in the Sainte Marie enterprise. Her husband, Dr. Jean Willien, had died in Haguenau in 1840, and her son after finishing his medical studies in Saint Louis and in Europe, later located in Terre Haute, where he was the founder of Saint Anthony's Hospital. He became one of the most eminent physicians in Indiana, and was the Community physician at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for thirty-five years. Madame Willien lived at the Visitors' Home for some years while her granddaughter Louise Willien '88, the late Sister Mary Aloysius, S.S.N.D., was in school.

On October 7, Mother Theodore received word that the Bishop wished her to meet him in New York to take charge of the group of postulants and to look about the city for information and ideas which would be helpful for completing and furnishing the new motherhouse. She set out at once and so hurriedly that some of the Sisters missed saying good-bye to her. Not since 1843 had she been over the route east to New York, and what great changes and improvements she saw on all sides! The poor ramshackle Cathedral she had seen in Cincinnati in 1840 was replaced by a spacious and handsome edifice, and the new seminary rose upon one of the loftiest of the city's many hills. The immense progress of religion was evident also in the twelve Catholic churches in the city, and seven others in the immediate vicinity. Hurrying on eastward she arrived in New York on October 11 and saw again the magnificent harbor with its diversified shipping and Broadway with its confusion of traffic and new houses going up everywhere, Alexander Stewart's white marble department store, "the handsomest shop in the world" towering in the midst. The Bishop and his party had landed a day earlier on the feast of Saint Francis Borgia. A telegram told the good news to the anxious hearts at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

We were saying Vespers, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to her mother, and I continued them, and then, with a voice trembling with emotion I said aloud: "We will recite a Pater and Ave to thank God for the arrival of our Bishop in

⁵⁴ On the same vessel was M. Camille de Buisserets, Sister Camille Ostendorf's grandfather, whom Bishop de Saint-Palais persuaded to settle in Vincennes.

⁵⁵ Family MSS. in the possession of Helen Willien O'Mara, '01.

New York." The prayers were responded to in like manner, and the eyes of more than one were moist with tears. We then went to "Our Lady of the Valley" at the washhouse to tell our Sisters the good news. There we thanked the Blessed Virgin. How I miss Mother Theodore! We would have embraced each other so tenderly! But the consolation of going to meet Elvire has been reserved for her. Dear Elvire! She arrived on the feast of Saint Francis Borgia. How do you like the name of Borgia? I had selected that of Mary Eustelle for her, but Mother Theodore wants her called Liguori. Perhaps Father Bishop has already given her a name. About this future name Mother Theodore and I were like the family were before the birth of Clementine, whom poor dear Uncle de la Motte wished to be named Esther, so he could say to her: "Come to your old Uncle Mardochai."⁶⁶

Anxious to get home, the Bishop wished to leave New York next day. Mother Theodore had therefore no opportunity for looking at convents, but happily had time to embrace again her dear friend and benefactor Madame Parmentier in Brooklyn. The travelers left at once reaching Madison on October 16. Two days of rest and relaxation were not too much for His Lordship there in his old parish where Fathers Corbe and Lalumiere came to greet him and congratulate him on his safe return after sixteen months absence. The entire party left for Terre Haute on October 19. Next day Sister Saint Francis Xavier added another page to her letter to Saint-Servan:

Today after eleven years' absence I shall again see my cherished sister. Oh! that I may be for her a model and a support. . . .

This afternoon I shall go to Terre Haute to meet our new family. Madame Picquet has already arrived, and is a charming lady. I am glad Elvire traveled with her. Yesterday the postulants prepared five beds for their future companions, and they put on Elvire's the blanket you sent me and the linen having my mark. It is difficult for them to study, so anxious are they to see their new Sisters. It was only four days before the arrival of the steamer that I knew from a letter written by Bishop de Saint-Palais that Elvire was really coming. Until then Mother Theodore and I made frequent acts of confidence and resignation, even while reading the Bishop's letter, for it was only in the postscript he said: "I have just received news from Saint Servan; all is arranged. Mlle. le Fer will come."⁶⁷

And again:

At last I have seen and embraced her. My mother, I did not recognize her countenance, but how soon I recognized her heart! It was the family altogether. "You will find it in Elvire," wrote Mother Mary. Oh, yes; or rather I have never lost it, for the dear family is imprinted in the depths of my soul—is engraved there; but Elvire is the frame wherein those beloved beings seem to live and speak. Father Corbe and the Sisters all think her charming, and old Sister Olympiade has become ten years younger. I am afraid we shall spoil the dear child. After the lapse of a week I will write to you, or rather to Lorette, for you must all have sorrowful hearts. I will write to all. Thank you, thank you, my mother, for having consented to send us your treasure.⁶⁸

Not till six days later did Monseigneur leave Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for Vincennes where he was impatiently expected, so much did he have to tell the Sisters of their beloved motherhouse of Ruillé, which he had visited twice, and their kind Father Bishop Bouvier, also of their friends

⁶⁶ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 359.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

and relatives, whom he had faithfully sought out, and of his own happiness at seeing his brothers and their families in Languedoc, and visiting with them his eldest sister, Sister d'Aussac, superior of the Sisters of Charity's hospice at Douay in Belgium. He took supper one day at the academy as the guest of the pupils, and came regularly to the Sisters' recreation each evening. His trunks contained generous gifts from Ruillé, everything the Sisters had asked for, and many valuable and interesting objects. Mother Mary had paid a debt of eighteen hundred francs incurred in Paris by Mother Theodore, and she sent copies of the ceremonial for Community professions and receptions, and a number of the white bone pectoral crosses, so dear to the Sisters and impossible to procure in America, and other things desirable to keep the American foundation in harmony with the French motherhouse. Sister Eudoxie, the mistress of novices at Ruillé, sent a statue of Our Lady of La Salette to the American novitiate.

Joy and gratitude for the numerous gifts filled every heart, but still more highly prized was the little band of postulants.

Elvire is a daughter made to order. I consider her a gift from the Lord, and if He spares her, she will do much good here. . . . The English lady pleases every one. . . . I find in her an admirable simplicity and candor which gives me great hope for the future. . . . The little lacemakers have been quite timid, but they are very submissive and feel contented, they say, at Saint Mary's.⁶⁰

Thus did Mother Theodore resume her first impressions of the group, two of whom were destined to spend many years of usefulness in the Community in widely differing spheres, and the third was without doubt one of God's greatest gifts to the Congregation.

⁶⁰ Aux Mères de Ruillé, 29 octobre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

CHAPTER XXIX

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AT SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

"Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, that
romantic spot."

BISHOP VAN DE VELDE, S.J.

BISHOP de Saint-Palais's stay of a week at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods gave him the opportunity of observing the progress of the new building not yet under roof when he arrived, and of taking general cognizance of Mother Theodore's plans for finishing it and financing its completion and furnishing. When the Bishop left Indiana sixteen months earlier, the first sod had not been turned, and he now found a corps of forty men at work on a substantial and roomy structure almost ready to roof. He went over the house carefully and expressed himself as completely satisfied. The Bishop greatly admired the beautiful natural setting in which the new convent was rising. The surrounding woods were in fact in their autumn glory. The numerous dead trees, which had defaced the forest primeval, had by 1852 all disappeared beneath the woodcutter's axe to be turned into excellent firewood. Monseigneur's openly expressed satisfaction repaid the Foundress in a measure for the many anxious hours which had been involved in the undertaking.

He was the bearer of many letters, and Sister Marie-Ludovic, Mother Mary's secretary, had sent the list of the French establishments, the very one Bishop Bouvier had used at the close of the retreat at Ruillé to give the Sisters their missions. "Monseigneur . . . thinks our house is magnificent," wrote Mother Theodore to France, "and he approves of all. . . . He is truly a father always."¹ In addition to the numerous gifts he had brought to the Community from Ruillé, his trunks when they arrived were found to contain valuable furnishings for the new chapel, which he had purchased in France, candlesticks and sconces, and other ornaments, and a very beautiful and ingeniously contrived Infant for the Christmas Crib, lying upon straw. A novice, Sister Agatha, looking reverently upon the lovely little figure was amazed to see it open its eyes and extend its little arms as though to speak to her, movements produced by pulling a concealed cord.

The party of postulants established at Saint Mary's, and the new convent in the Vigo County woods ascertained to be rising satisfactorily, the Bishop's next concern was for his two orphan asylums. They too were in excellent condition, the children, one hundred and nine in number, seventy-one girls and thirty-eight boys, all in good health, "fat and rosy," as Mother Theodore had found them during her visitation in Vincennes some months earlier. The blessing of God seemed to rest visibly upon the two institutions, for during the cholera epidemic in the town in August not one child among the orphans had been attacked. The fact that both asylums were succeeding so admirably gave great consolation to the noble-hearted Bishop.

¹ Aux Supérieures de Ruillé, 29 octobre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

The Sisters loved these forsaken children, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier's interest in them was second only to the Bishop's. She loved nothing better than to visit them and was always touched to hear their little voices rising in the pathetic aspirations of the Litany of Divine Providence, "Providence of God, support of the orphan," and "Providence of God, which nourishes those who are hungry." She observed their sturdy appetites with wonder and yet with a certain trepidation lest the Bishop's limited resources should fail. The Bishop was ingenious, however, in finding ways to fill their hungry little mouths. During the pork packing season in Vincennes the parts of the animals unsuitable for conserving, the spare ribs, the liver, and the feet, in France considered a delicacy, were put aside at the Bishop's request and given to the orphans. They gathered around Sister Saint Francis eagerly to recite their prayers and their catechism, whenever she came to the asylums. On one occasion when she was driving to the Cathedral in a carriage furnished by some friends, she took with her a poor little cripple who could never walk to church, and showed him all the statues and pictures with appropriate explanations. "I have just made a trip to Vincennes where I devoted myself to our . . . orphan boys," she wrote to Mother Mary. "I spent the night at the orphanage and took the children, who are very good and very pious, to the chapel to pray for you. . . . Our little girls are very interesting, but I always prefer the boys. . . . I have still another partiality, that for the Negroes of whom there are many on the outskirts of Vincennes and who are indeed abandoned. I paid them a visit,"² she added.

A week or so after his departure from Saint Mary's, Monseigneur invited the postulants from Europe to visit his two asylums and sent his carriage driven by one of the seminarians to take them to Vincennes. They had been given a week's *congé* by Mother Theodore, and accompanied by her they left on November 5 and spent a few days in the historic old town. Despite the multitude of duties and business affairs which claimed his attention upon his return to his see, the Bishop had at once taken measures to provide for his orphans. The Vincennes *Gazette* during the following weeks was making urgent appeals to the people of the episcopal city to give their patronage to a fair to be held in the old college building for the benefit of Saint Mary's and Saint Vincent's Asylums, which were now housing one hundred and twenty-two children. The expense of maintaining them, clothing and educating them, had now with the strictest economy reached the figure of three thousand five hundred dollars yearly, and the Bishop was appealing at once on his return as he did so often later to the generosity of the people of Vincennes to come to his assistance in meeting this heavy obligation.

On their return to Saint Mary-of-the Woods their week of freedom over, the new postulants were formally introduced to the customs of the novitiate and to the practices of the religious life, and applied themselves at once to the acquisition of the religious spirit and virtues. Elvire tells us that all the customs which she saw did not at once appeal to her. "I did not care for the small practices," she wrote later, "I wanted to do great things in the service of God." Accordingly at Madison when Mother

² 15 septembre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

Theodore had entered her room to wake her with the customary salutation, *Vive Jesus dans nos cœurs*,³ she feigned to be asleep and did not reply. Later returning from Mass she said to Mother Theodore, "I was a hypocrite this morning. I was not asleep." Then Mother Theodore explained to her with so much interest and kindness the value and utility of such observances sanctioned by the teachings of Our Lord, that she never forgot the lesson.⁴

The novitiate to which the group of young women from Europe were introduced was now well established. Orientated to the needs of a missionary country as a quiet retreat of prayer and study, it had been growing steadily and now counted a fervent group several members of which were destined to render long and distinguished service. They enjoyed the daily spiritual stimulation of training by the Foundress herself. They drank deeply of her immense store of the lore of asceticism and learned from her precepts and from the shining example of her daily life of complete sacrifice the easy ways of divine love. She now knew the American character thoroughly, its uprightness, its devotedness, its indifference to hardships, and willing subjection to faith and love. But owing to the lack of the continuous early religious training to be found in Catholic countries, the postulants, for whom a year's training had been considered adequate in France, were retained in America in the novitiate two or even three years for intensive instruction in the religious life. Even then Mother Theodore did not consider their formation complete and had long felt the need of capable women of deep spirituality who as local superiors would continue the training of the novices on the missions. In letter after letter up to the time of Bishop de Saint-Palais's voyage to Europe, she had entreated the French superiors to send two or three experienced Sisters, not talented necessarily, but endowed with mature judgment to act as local superiors. When no one was forthcoming even in response to Bishop de Saint-Palais's urgent appeals to the Community during his visit to Ruillé, she at long last resigned herself to the evident will of God.

"God knows what our dear Community needs," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, "and He will send us, I hope, persons competent to lead others, or else He will do as He did formerly for the Hebrews before they had kings. He will lead them Himself."⁵ She had asked Sister Euèxie to have the postulants at Ruillé pray to Saint Joseph to procure for them through Bishop de Saint-Palais some pious and devoted young girls for the novitiate, persons of solid virtue. If some natural talents could be added to the gifts of grace, she would be grateful. "As to that, however," she added "I leave him free."⁶ This prayer had now been generously answered. Elvire Le Fer de la Motte and Mary Marshall⁷ were persons of great promise, and they entered with the utmost zeal and earnestness upon the work of their novitiate.

If Mother Theodore's urgent request for additional Sisters from France remained unanswered, she was not without competent assistance. She had

³ May Jesus reign in our hearts.

⁴ *L'Indiana*, p. 316.

⁵ A Mère Saint Charles, 8 juillet, 1851. S.M.W.A.

⁶ 15 novembre, 1851. S.M.W.A.

⁷ Later known as Sister Mary Eudoxie.

in fact one instrument for the training of the American novices, fragile and delicate, but made of the stuff of saints, one whose daily life of evident and complete surrender to the loftiest ideals was almost enough in itself to form the observant Americans, Sister Saint Francis Xavier. They learned from her the honor there is in a hidden life of labor and prayer and sacrifice, and she taught them with a rare wisdom to follow gaily and courageously along the ways of the spiritual life as she hastened on before. She never forgot Mother Mary's judgment upon her that she was good only to love God, and this love knew in her heart neither pause nor diminution. Its unearthly fragrance exhales from every page of her letters. "Ask Him," she wrote to Sister Eudoxie in 1851, "to make me love Him with all my strength, not to let me die without loving Him thus at least for one hour."⁸

The independent Americans gradually conformed their lives to her example and teaching and eventually merited the approval of their clear-sighted superior. No one appreciated more highly Sister Saint Francis Xavier's exceptional spiritual qualities than the discerning French missionary priests. Father Benoit called Mother Theodore's attention to the fact that in Sister Saint Francis Xavier the fine quality of the blade was wearing away the scabbard all too quickly, and Father DuPontavice saw in her another Marie Eustelle.⁹ Seeing how frail and suffering she was, the superior's heart often sank with apprehension lest God should take her. And then where would she turn to replace her? "Loved and venerated by every one," wrote Mother Theodore in 1852, "she continues to be our consolation and an example to the whole Community."¹⁰

By the time of Bishop de Saint-Palais's return from Europe the tremendous tide of immigration which had swept across the Atlantic from Ireland after the famine of 1847 and from Germany after the political upheaval of the same period had begun to make itself felt in the Vincennes diocese. The population of the state increased one hundred per cent in one generation, and the decade of the 1850's taxed the Bishop's limited resources to the utmost to cope with the phenomenal growth of the Church during these years. The number of Catholics doubled and in some places trebled over night. "Few periods in our ecclesiastical history witnessed so marvelous an advance in progress as the three crowded years between the [Baltimore] Councils of 1849 and 1852," writes the learned author of the *History of the Councils of Baltimore*.¹¹ The river towns showed the influx first. Father DuPontavice recorded a typical situation in Madison where the number of Catholics doubled in a single year, with a fifty per cent increase in the Christmas Communions.

The Bishop's crying need was for priests to minister to the teeming Catholic population. He had reopened the seminary before leaving for France and placed it under Father Chassé's direction. Now he transferred it to the roomy frame building often called "the Bishop's palace," erected

⁸ 15 novembre, 1851. S.M.W.A.

⁹ Marie-Eustelle Harpain, a saintly French seamstress, called "The Angel of the Eucharist," born in 1814 in Saint Pallais, a suburb of the town of Saintes in the Department of Charente Inférieure, where she died in 1842.

¹⁰ A Mère Marie, 26 janvier, 1852. S.M.W.A.

¹¹ Guilday, p. 168.

in 1847 by Bishop de la Hailandière on the three-hundred acre farm he had purchased at the Highlands, three miles south of Vincennes on the road to Petersburg. Here Saint Charles Borromeo's Seminary opened with sixteen students under the charge of Father John Guéguen, one of the best theologians and one of the most devoted and exemplary priests in the diocese.

A Breton from the department of Morbihan on the Bay of Biscay, Father Guéguen had formed part of Father Martin's missionary colony of 1839, was ordained the following year, and spent his early years on the northern Illinois missions where he frequented Sister Mary Cecilia's family home at the Bailly Homestead as we have seen. For some years he had been stationed in Indianapolis where his best efforts in behalf of religion met with but meager response. Richard Beste was struck in 1851 with the marked contrast offered by the static religious state of Indianapolis compared with the flourishing diocese of Cincinnati:

We walked out to evening service. It was the festival of Corpus Christi. Poor Rev. Mr. Guéguen was in a desponding state. We were no longer in the go-ahead diocese of Cincinnati, but in the old diocese of Vincennes founded by French settlers . . . where French clergy and the apathy of French routine have to contend with American energy; four bare brick walls were indeed roofed in for a church, but whitewash and plaster there were not. Pavement there was not. There was a capital organ, but no one to play on it or sing. Mr. Guéguen, himself of French origin, had been there for many years; he had himself created whatever now existed. He introduced us to the great lady of his congregation, an Irishwoman by birth, married to Col. Drake . . . a thorough American."¹²

The Bishop on transferring Father Guéguen to Highland gave him as an assistant Father John Contin, who had returned from Saint Louis greatly benefited in health.

Father Contin is better, wrote Father DuPontavice in April, 1853, and the Bishop expects to send him to the seminary to assist Father Guéguen, who was about to die of fatigue and overwork till the Bishop put Contin at the seminary. Now he is better, is happy as a prince, and charms his pupils by the lucidity of his lessons and the *Vincennes* by the solidity of his sermons.¹³

In the Bishop's endeavor to build up a native clergy powerful assistance was rendered by the colony of monks of the ancient order of Saint Benedict from the celebrated Swiss Abbey of Einsiedeln, the first members of which arrived in Indiana early in 1853. The coming of the Benedictines was doubtless the greatest single benefit resulting from the Bishop's European voyage. Located in the canton of Schwyz, this renowned abbey dedicated to Our Lady of Hermits was founded on the site of the hermitage established by the Hohenzollern recluse, Saint Meinrad, in the ninth century. The abbey church, said to have been consecrated by Our Lord Himself in 948, which enshrined the miraculous statue honored by Saint Meinrad, became a celebrated place of pilgrimage ranking with Rome, Loretto, and

¹² Beste, *The Wabash*, vol. 1, pp. 261-262. Col. James P. Drake had commanded a company of Indiana volunteers during the Mexican War and was now state treasurer. His daughters Ruth, Almeria, and Anna, were pupils at Saint Mary's during these years. Mrs. Drake maintained a hotel in Indianapolis where Mother Theodore and the Sisters often spent the night en route to Madison. Almeria Drake was baptized in the convent chapel at Saint Mary's by Bishop de Saint-Palais on his return from Europe.

¹³ Du Pontavice Collection, 2 avril, 1853.

Compostela. For a thousand years the abbey has been a shrine of learning and piety."

The Abbot Henry IV granted the colony of monks with the approval of the Holy See for the double objective of acting as missionaries in the diocese of Vincennes and training a native clergy. Among the Einsiedeln Community in 1852 was one member eminently fitted for the new mission in America, the twenty-six-year-old, London-born monk, Father Bede O'Connor, ordained the previous year. Of Irish parentage, James O'Connor had made the acquaintance of the Benedictines in London and entered the monastery school at Einsiedeln as a boy in 1840. Eloquent, resourceful, and highly gifted, Father Bede was destined to play a prominent part in the diocese as pastor, chancellor, and vicar general until his untimely death in 1875 in Terre Haute, where he lies buried in Saint Joseph's cemetery. His fluent German deceived the good Germans of Southern Indiana, who could hardly be convinced that "Vater Beda" was not one of themselves, and an equal command of French made him able to render highly valued assistance to the Bishop. He was always Monseigneur's preferred companion on his diocesan tours even before his appointment as chancellor and vicar general. His eloquence caused him to be eagerly sought as a preacher and lecturer.

With Father Bede on his arrival in Indiana was associated an older monk, Father Ulrich Christen, a native Swiss. They landed in New York, January 31, 1853, and after some months purchased one hundred and sixty acres of woods and farm land near the Ohio River in Spencer County, the identical spot where Sister Saint Ange had earlier heard the mysterious psalmody and bells. Under the invocation of the medieval solitary, Saint Meinrad, the Community, constantly recruited by additional members from Europe, extended its missionary activities with excellent results in southern Indiana, and eventually opened a school, where Judge Huntington's son, Robert, was one of the first pupils. By entering thus the important field of education, the monks were able to supplement the labors of Father Sorin's Community at Notre Dame du Lac in the training of boys, the Sisters of Providence remaining for almost the entire span of the Foundress's lifetime the only religious order in the diocese devoted to the education of girls.

Father Christen, accompanied by Father Leonard Brandt, visited Saint Mary-of-the-Woods twice in March during a ten days stay there by Monseigneur. The two monks, Fathers Bede and Ulrich, had reached Vincennes in mid-February, and the Bishop wrote for Father Corbe to come to meet them promising to drive him back. On this visit His Lordship brought his portrait painted in oils during his stay in Europe and handsomely framed in gold, a copy of the original painted at the same time for the episcopal mansion in Vincennes by Darjou in Paris. This valued portrait represents Monseigneur already growing stout, but still a young man, his abundant brown hair only slightly touched with gray, wearing a purple-faced cape and lace rochet and seated in a red chair. His face appears in three-quarter left view, one patrician hand with handsome episcopal ring on the arm of the chair, and his brown eyes and benevolent expression reveal his

¹⁴ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Article "Einsiedeln."

character. This canvas he presented to the motherhouse, where it is still a treasured possession. He also offered a large oil painting long known as *Saint Eudoxie in the Desert*, an original canvas by the well-known contemporary French historical painter of the school of Gros, Firmin Féron, appropriately framed, which hung for many years in Sister Mary Eudoxie's music room at the academy.¹⁵ "May God recompense this good father for all he does for his daughters of the forest," wrote Mother Theodore in the diary.

After a ten-days stay His Lordship left for Vincennes and the two Fathers for Lafayette, as the monks were still engaged in the survey of the state which preceded their permanent settlement in Spencer County. Father Christen gave familiar details of his visit in a letter to the dean of the monastery at Einsiedeln:

In my missionary journeys I have already traversed a good part of the state of Indiana. Despite its great flatness [Father Ulrich had not yet been in southern Indiana where Saint Meinrad was to be founded]—I find the land pleasing; especially Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, where a motherhouse of teaching Sisters with a beautiful establishment and a good-sized institution for young ladies cozily situated, has made a charming impression. Because the Bishop was there just then and business led us to him, [the Rev.] Mr. Brandt and I visited this institution twice when we were engaged in giving a mission in Terre Haute and had finished it. There in an atmosphere of childlike simplicity and piety one feels so much at home and so well. It also seemed that the Right Reverend Bishop, who together with a keen eye and fine tact is possessed of great amiability, felt himself freer and more at ease when in our company in the evening he could sing with pure tone and sure rhythm the Swiss yodels, the Savoyard songs, and the *salonaises* that he had learned in his youth. The last time we were with him he took leave of the beloved chapel in the woods and returned with us to Terre Haute.

The exigencies of pioneer travel appear in the concluding passage of this letter:

Behold an American bishop's entry into one of the biggest cities of his diocese! Four cart horses come first on account of the mud which in American roads reaches to the hub. To these four horses there is hitched a wagon with a wagon box. Across this wagon box there lie three boards; on the first sits a monk from Einsiedeln together with the driver; on the second board sits the Bishop and to his right, the Reverend Father Brandt; behind them the superioress of the Sisters' convent at Saint Mary's [it was the Servant of God, Mother Theodore Guérin] with a candidate of the Order; finally, in the rear of the wagon bed the Reverend Father Corbe, the priest of the congregation of Saint Mary's, on a bundle of hay for the horses. The caravan goes through the long and wide streets of Terre Haute, and nobody thinks that it ought to be otherwise.¹⁶

¹⁵ This name Eudoxia or Eudoxie, long a favorite at Ruillé where it was borne by the beloved mistress of novices, Sister Eudoxie, was the name of a number of holy women canonized by popular devotion, with feast days in various calendars. The attributes of this painting point however to the ex-empress Eudocia, often erroneously called Eudoxie. This celebrated woman, the wife of the Greek Emperor Theodosius II, is also often given the title of saint. Her daughter Eudoxia married the Western Emperor Valentinian III. Eudocia fell into disgrace and retired from the court of Theodosius to Jerusalem (442) where she spent the remainder of her life in seclusion and good works near the tomb of Christ. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Article "Eudocia."

¹⁶ March 15, 1853, Translation by courtesy of the Reverend Albert Kleber, O.S.B., of Saint Meinrad's Abbey.

A wagon and two horses was the usual conveyance for a gentleman across Illinois and Indiana in the early 1850's, as Beste assures us, and the plank roads reduced the jolting.¹⁷ This useful vehicle seems to have been quite unfamiliar at first to the French Sisters, who had seen only carts in use in France.

Owing to Bishop de Saint-Palais's absence in Europe he had missed the first Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1852 with its insistence upon the necessity of establishing parochial schools wherever possible. The Bishop needed no urging however in this direction. His zeal for Catholic education and his esteem for its place in a well rounded scheme of Catholic expansion are evidenced in the two orphan asylums which he established at once on entering upon his episcopal career and maintained afterwards at immense sacrifices. They were designed not only to house the homeless little ones and to arrest a definite leakage in the Church, but to give a proper education to the destitute Catholic children of Indiana. Schools everywhere as soon as circumstances warranted them and made them possible were an essential part of his program for the development of his diocese. Especially in his pressing duty of organizing the immigrants, instructing them, and facilitating the practice of their religious duties, he realized the absolute necessity of Catholic education.

The need for schools is hardly adverted to however in the Bishop's far-reaching plans for his diocese, as he felt and said from the very first that he relied upon the daughters of Mother Theodore for this important task. He had in fact no more powerful or devoted auxiliaries. The Bishop's reliance upon Mother Theodore was complete: "He makes his authority felt only by his benefactions. He never embarrasses the administration. He gives us counsels full of wisdom but leaves us in full liberty not to follow them if obstacles present themselves. On our part we make it a duty to second the beneficent views of this admirable prelate."¹⁸ A letter to Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer written about this time expresses Monseigneur de Saint-Palais's constant sentiments towards all the daughters of Providence:

Please assure all your daughters, who are mine also, that . . . my long absence has not caused me to forget them and that I have remembered them often both before God and men. I have also spoken of my daughters of Providence with a species of pride, and I trust they will always sustain the good reputation I have given them. I have great need of assistance in the good works of my diocese, and I feel confident that by their zeal, their piety, and their fidelity in fulfilling all the duties of their vocation they will supply for what is lacking in their father. Present my affectionate regards to each one, and assure them anew of my interest in the establishment of Fort Wayne, and in all those who have charge of it.

Your devoted father in Our Lord,

✠ MAURICE, *Bishop of Vincennes*¹⁹

Only once did the Foundress show any opposition to his plans and that when he proposed confiding his beloved orphans to another order leaving the Sisters of Providence free to devote themselves to their work in the academies. "To have Father Sorin's Sisters at the asylums and the Sisters

¹⁷ Beste, *The Wabash*, vol. 1, p. 296.

¹⁸ *L'Indiana*, p. 220.

¹⁹ 15 novembre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

of Providence teaching piano, etc.! He told Father Corbe he was not equal to making such proposals to me," wrote the Foundress to Mother Mary.²⁰ The terms in which he commended in Europe the work of Mother Theodore and her Sisters were such as to fill the heart of Bishop Bouvier with the keenest satisfaction. Indiana's need was however urgent and thus far unsatisfied, and for this reason the Bishop would never permit the Community to extend the field of its labors beyond the limits of his diocese.

The Community was now growing steadily, efficiently organized, and standing in the first rank among secular educators of young girls, not alone in Indiana where they were the only religious educators in the field, but also throughout the West. In his message to the Legislature²¹ of December 4, 1849, Governor Paris C. Dunning had referred to the facilities for higher education of girls available in Indiana: "It is a source of unmingled pleasure to be able to state that the important subject of female education is rapidly gaining a strong hold upon the feeling of our people." Among the "many flourishing female institutions in our state" the Governor mentioned Saint Mary-of-the-Woods among the first five "where fair daughters get as good as the more favored portion of our country." The Community's preeminence in the educational field was never contested even by the bitterest opponents of their religion. Attacks upon the Sisters of Providence, their schools, and especially their academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were not wanting, but they were almost invariably prefaced by a flattering tribute to their remarkable success as educators. It was in fact this very success, so marked by this time as to attract the daughters of the élite among Protestant families in the state, that elicited the illwill of prejudiced minds. Mother Theodore, with her eyes fixed upon the future and always so reserved in her encomiums, so loath to give her complete approbation, described the success which had crowned the Community's efforts to her old friend Abbé Perché in New Orleans:

What great changes have taken place here. . . . Our solitude is peopled with young persons who have hastened here, some to consecrate themselves to God, others to acquire useful knowledge. Of the latter we have some fifty in our boarding school. . . . The education which they receive is even in the opinion of our enemies, superior to anything given in our state.²²

The enrollment was now taxing to the utmost the accommodations of the academy building, which had been enlarged along generous lines only six years before. Plans to add to it still further as soon as the mother-house was complete and furnished began to be a frequent topic of conversation as the Sisters sat sewing or knitting in the candlelight at their evening recreation perhaps around the worn Thralls dining table they had used in 1840. An unrealized project which dates from this period was to open a *pensionnat* at reduced rates for needy Catholic girls in the old Thralls house as soon as it was vacated.²³ Another was to care for the Negroes, as has been noted. Monseigneur "has promised me a school for Negroes," Sister Saint Francis Xavier confided to Sister Eudoxie at Ruillé

²⁰ 17 février, 1852. S.M.W.A.

²¹ P. 99.

²² 17 juin, 1852. N.D.U.A.

²³ Sister Saint Francis Xavier à Mgr. Bouvier, 21 février, 1853. S.M.W.A.

in 1851. "We have to decorate our schoolroom a black Madonna before which Saint Francis de Sales used to pray. Then as Father Claver has just been canonized, he will be the right patron of our Negroes."²⁴

Mother Theodore had ordered fifty-two iron beds from Prosper Eluère at Vincennes, but the Wabash was so low during the autumn of 1852 that no steamboats could reach Terre Haute with either freight or passengers, and one by one the Sisters gave up their beds to the pupils, and slept contentedly upon mattresses laid upon ticks stuffed with corn shucks on the floor of the old Thralls convent, joyous in their poverty. Straw or shucks and often the bare floor had been the usual beds of the early Indiana settlers. As each new pupil arrived, there was among the Sisters a combat of generosity. Mother Theodore wished again to give her mattress, which was rejected energetically. Sister Saint Francis Xavier was quick jocosely to offer hers also, but as she had already given it up two years before, she got little attention. When the February semester opened with its influx of new pupils, almost all the Sisters were sleeping on the floor, and all the postulants except two, of whom Elvire was one. "Most of them have only their straw ticks, and Mother Theodore, I suppose to mortify me, leaves me enthroned upon my mattress," said Sister Mary Joseph. All the recreations were busily employed in making ticks and picking the wool from the Community sheep for mattresses, or out-of-doors helping in the making of maple sugar, for which the locality, Sugar Creek, was noted, which was very abundant this year.

Our boarding school is the best in Indiana and would be considered very good even in France, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to her family in 1853. We have eighty pupils and expect several others. I do not know any young persons better instructed than our best pupils. Mr. Pinatel, a former Naval officer, was astonished at their knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. Having devoted much time to drawing, he was best pleased with that part of the examination. They excel however especially in the principles of our holy religion and in ecclesiastical history and sacred history. This last branch is studied by Protestants as well as Catholics.²⁵

Sister Ann Cecilia's reminiscences give a picture of the school at this time:

I entered the academy as a pupil in 1852, when twelve years old. Mother, or Sister Mary Cecilia as she was then, was Superior of the Institute and first assistant to Mother Theodore. She was a wonderfully competent person, her mind broad enough to take in the general outlines of any subject, and yet capable of the most careful attention to details. In addition to her duties as superior, she taught several of the advanced classes. The number of pupils was about ninety. Sister Saint Urbain, Sister Maurice, Sister Mary James, and Sister Victoire were our teachers, with last but not least, Mr. Heitz, principal music teacher till Sister Mary Eudoxie replaced him. Sister Lucy was in charge of the infirmary and lingerie, and Sister Therese, an excellent cook, presided in the kitchen. I must not forget dear Sister Josephine, who taught botany. Her beautiful spirit of self-sacrifice had made her not only loved but venerated, and her death was felt as a great loss.

Mother Theodore we met not often but occasionally about the grounds. As I remember her, she was above medium height, well proportioned, looking, I imagine, somewhat taller than she really was. Her black eyes were expressive and sparkling. . . . The sweet and benign expression of her countenance seemed to impart a blessing and her calmness and composure to raise her to a higher plane above and be-

²⁴ 15 novembre, 1851. S.M.W.A.

²⁵ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 314.

yond everyone else. Her manner of addressing one was singularly condescending and unpretentious, unmarked by anything like the imperious or authoritative. On feast days she came herself to the refectory at dessert and treated us to claret in true French fashion.

On exhibition day, or rather days, for two days of public examination preceded the day of conferring the prizes, Mother Theodore presided. We were all present dressed in white and wearing over our dresses colored silk aprons. Bishop de Saint-Palais was seated on the stage, but Mother Theodore herself, as was then the custom, gave each pupil her prize and crowned those who had won this distinction, kissing each on the forehead. The last exhibition day that I remember, which must have been one of the last also of Mother Theodore's life, was held in a large room of new Providence.

The buildings at Saint Mary's, as they were in my childhood, were very suitable, and even imposing. The first academy had been added to by the construction of wings on both sides. The Mound was just in front, and across the back ran quite large porches. Within and without, the building was both pretty and commodious.

On Sundays and great feasts we went to Mass in the village church, of which Father Corbe was pastor. The church stood only a short distance from the academy, and we entered by a side door near the communion railing. Mother Theodore's place was by the first pillar in front, Sister Saint Francis's close by. Mr. Heitz, who was a thoroughly trained musician, was organist, and Sister Victoire, Sister Mary Ambrose, and Sister Mary Joseph sang. One special occasion that still lives in my memory was the wedding of John Delahaye, the community gardener, who had come from France with his sister at Mother Theodore's solicitation some years previous.

Of all the early Sisters, the one who inspired me with the most awe, strange to say, was Sister Saint Francis. Her post as Mistress of Novices may have had something to do with it and her well known sanctity, but I never conquered a certain fear on coming into her presence. Yet I was thrown with her more perhaps than any of the other pupils, in the drawing and painting classes of which she had the supervision. Kept carefully for a long time among my most cherished treasures were two small gifts received from her at different times, a tiny hand-painted souvenir, a pansy with a French motto below it, and two little paper volumes, "Mes Doutes" which, as I was not then a Catholic, she probably intended for my soul's welfare. The Sisters believed thoroughly in the good results of premiums. One year eighteen books fell to my share, which recompensed me somewhat for my hours of close application.

Our privations were the privations of the time. All the water used in the dormitories was carried to the third floor, where it was kept in barrels on the porch, and where each morning in winter we cheerfully broke the ice. Stoves were a rarity, the overheated condition of American houses not being then a proverb, as it is now.

Our outings in the woods shine with a bright light in memory. A large fire was built, and chickens dressed and cooked, potatoes roasted, and other toothsome edibles concocted in the kettles which dear Sister Ann brought out in the cart. Once a kind-hearted farmer invited us to feast on his cherries. Our every day amusements were simpler, the playground being much as it is now, minus the shrines.

A little rustic oratory however, begun by dear Sister Mary Ursula before she left school, stood against one of the large beech trees and sheltered a little statue of the Blessed Virgin and all the objects of piety she was able to get together.²⁰

Visibly blessed by an all generous Providence and excellently fitted to carry out their divinely appointed mission to the children and young girls

²⁰ *The Aurora*, vol. 45, October, 1915, p. 310.

of Indiana, the religious now numbered fifty persons clothed in the sacred livery of Providence. Of these twelve were novices, but the fifteen postulants still in preliminary training included several persons of distinguished merit as their perspicacious superior acknowledged.²⁷ Mother Theodore's care in lengthening and solidifying the novitiate had now borne its logical fruit in a disciplined group thoroughly grounded in the spiritual life and admirably fitted for the works of zeal to which they were destined. This precious result was due largely under God to the saintly superior whom God had given them. Loved and revered by her Sisters, she was also held in highest esteem by Bishop de Saint-Palais and by the Community's friend and counselor of thirty years, Father Corbe. Father Arnold Damen, S.J., could well remark in 1852 that there were probably very few superiors like her in America, and two years later the comment of the distinguished Jesuit novice master from Florissant, Father John L. Gleizal, upon hearing her address the Community was, "I have heard another Saint Teresa."²⁸

It was no doubt providential that now, when the Catholic population of Indiana was taking on so unprecedented a development, the Community was fully formed and ready to cooperate in the gigantic task of saving them for the kingdom of heaven. Steadily it advanced, reaching out, broadening its field, and extending its influence from year to year in the ever widening field of Catholic education, and pushing forward the frontier of religion as the frontier of adventure moved steadily westward. Thus was the lifework of the Foundress of the Sisters of Providence brought to fruition in the Indiana wilderness where God had placed them. Hers it was to trace the gradual, sure, yet measured advance with her eyes steadily fixed upon the changing needs and possibilities of the field, as it had been hers to formulate the necessary program and to give to the growing Community the training indispensable for its great task.

Developments were proving how well and how wisely she had planned. God had now given a sufficient number of Sisters to staff adequately the developing missions already assumed and to provide for expected growth. By intensive instruction over an ample period of time the spiritual formation of the Community and their intellectual preparation had been well advanced, to be further continued in the establishments and in gradually increasing degree during the summer vacations at the motherhouse. No effort was spared to secure a select body of religious. A thorough study by the Foundress of the material conditions essential to success in their important work for the Church had resulted in regulations some for preliminary housing, living conditions, and salary for the Sisters, others for limitation of their duties within reasonable bounds and provision for the spiritual helps necessary to their vocation. This organization by which the Sisters receive a nominal salary is the now traditional parochial school system, which gradually replaced the *école payante* and *école gratuite* brought from France. So modest has been the emolument of the teaching Sisters especially in the beginning that it was only by the income from the music and art that they could subsist.

From 1844 on no schools were opened in remote and sparsely settled

²⁷ A ma Sœur Eudoxie, 20 novembre, 1851. S.M.W.A.

²⁸ Garraghan, *Jesuits of the Middle U. S.*, vol. 2, p. 144.

*From oil painting by
George Winter*

JACQUES ROQUET
1821-1853

Early architect and
builder at Saint Mary-
of-the-Woods.

(Below Right)

MARGARET ROQUET
WHEELER

She conned her first
lessons in the old vil-
lage school and was a
pupil for six years at
Saint Mary's Institute
in the 1860's.



(Above)

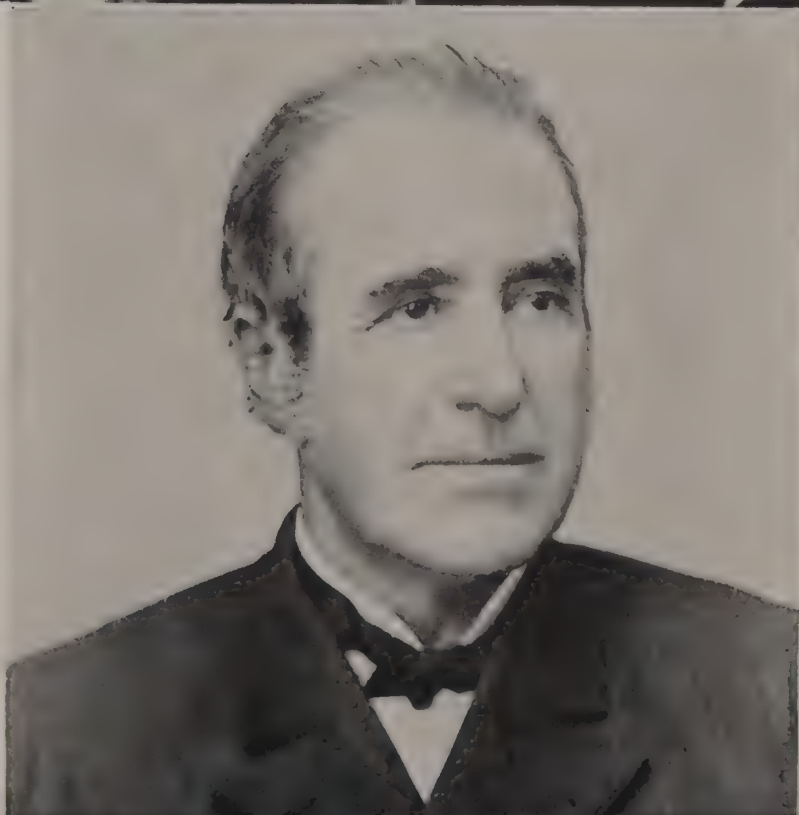
HUGH D. ROQUET

Legal adviser for years
of the Sisters of Provi-
dence.

(Right)

JOHN ROCHE

Distinguished citizen
of Huntington and
friend and benefactor
of the Sisters of Provi-
dence.





From the Boston Pilot, October 26, 1946

"Under the old motto, *God Sees Me*, public school children on released time learn of the moving Providence of God."



The annual procession to the woodland chapel of Saint Anne perpetuates the fulfillment of Mother Theodore's vow on the winter Atlantic in 1843.

localities too poor to support the Sisters, or with pupils too few or too irregular in attendance to make a school possible. The Community had lost an invaluable local superior from the bitter hardships suffered at Saint Peter's and Saint Francisville. After her return from France in 1844, the Foundress had also forbidden the mission Sisters to cook for the local clergy, a practice seriously disapproved by the French superiors. She had also insisted upon adequate housing for the teachers, a measure brought forth by the experience in the "old shed," where the Foundress had heard Sister Saint Liguori and Sister Augustine coughing away their lives at Saint Peter's.

Another preliminary requisite was an agreement as to salary, required by the French Rule, and already customary among other established teaching orders in America. This measure had been counseled very early by Bishop Bouvier and especially by Father Perché as far back as 1841. It met of course with opposition in Madison from the church trustees and from Father Delaune, the pastor, when the financial burden proved hard to shoulder. It was combated especially over a long period of time by Father Kundek, and his failure to provide adequate compensation for the teachers after the Jasper settlement had grown and waxed prosperous would have led to a discontinuance of the mission but for Mother Theodore's deep-seated predilection for this first establishment of the Sisters of Providence in America. As late as December, 1853, and again in 1854, she was writing to engage him to meet, not the regular salary or tuition charges customary by this time in all the missions, but as a special concession half the regular fixed terms, as the Sisters had been obliged during his long absence in Europe to go into debt for their maintenance. In Fort Wayne also the German parish was unable to meet the regular salary and functioned on a reduced basis, to Father Benoit's ill concealed disapprobation. Eventually the housing problem was partially solved by the Community's purchasing or building the local convents and in some places the schools also, a practice maintained for many years though now no longer in use.

By 1853 the mission schools were all in a flourishing condition and were accomplishing much good. The academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was educating a large mixed group of Catholic and Protestant young girls, and upon the missions similar mixed groups appeared in most of the schools. The free school, so commonly met with in Europe and so easily maintained in Catholic countries where religion met with generous support, had been already in general of necessity abandoned. The division of *école payante* and *école gratuite* early altered into Protestant and Catholic groups, the former with higher tuition charges for high school subjects. Catholic girls also frequented this group called the Academy, but it was mainly composed of non-Catholics.

All the changing trends of the times were reflected almost immediately in the schools. In response to the rapid influx of German immigrants into Indiana, another division from now on appeared increasingly among the Catholic pupils separating the English and Germans into groups. The latter eventually developed into distinct schools as the German Catholics broke off into their own parishes in accord with the current practice of retaining their language and national customs in America. Saint Mary's, Fort Wayne, was the first of these, as we have seen. During the Bishop's

absence the Vincennes Germans built Saint John's Church, which was blessed by Father Corbe in June, 1852. From now on the missions were supplied with young German-American Sisters, most of whom had received their education in Europe and who now began a fruitful apostolate among their fellow-countrymen in Indiana. Among the earliest of these successful German teachers were Sister Marie Joseph in Jasper, Sister Catherine in Fort Wayne, Sister Alphonse in Terre Haute, Sister Felicité in Madison, and Sister Michel in Vincennes, almost all of whom had long teaching careers filled with good works.

In the novitiate also at this period among the young persons of distinguished merit, of whom Mother Theodore had written to Bishop Bouvier, were several postulants of German origin who were fitted to take their place eventually in the new German schools. Among the Americans, Sister Saint Felix Buchanan, Sister Isidore, Francis Thralls's daughter, Sister Josephine, a talented young Sister whose death while still a novice caused universal regret, and the first American Sister Saint Charles, were all in the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods when Bishop de Saint-Palais arrived with his contingent from Europe. The name Sister Saint Charles was held in veneration in America from its association with the loved First Assistant, Mother Saint Charles at Ruillé. Mother Theodore tells that when the postulants were receiving their religious names at the close of the retreat in 1852, Father Corbe suddenly bestowed this revered name upon one of them. The French Sisters were thunderstruck, and there was a chorus of "ah's" in the recreation room from the rest of the Community who regarded the chaplain with "*gros yeux*"²⁹ for giving so casually this honored name. "Happily," remarked the Foundress, "this young person is a very worthy subject," but she could at first hardly call her by the name without tears.

Elvire Le Fer first saw Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at the lovely time of Indian summer, when the sun was shining upon the forest through a soft mist. An intimate picture of the novitiate during these last months in the old Thralls convent appears in her early letters published by her sister, Mme. de la Corbinière in *L'Indiana*. To Sister Saint Francis Xavier every novitiate joy was redoubled by having her sister to share it. Saint Francis Xavier's day of 1852 was no exception. She described it in one of her inimitable letters to her family:

Yesterday evening a superb feast was given me. It would make you happy to see how dearly I am loved. I say to myself: "My God, how faithfully You keep Your word; even in this world You reward those who have left all to follow You." When I left my family, I did not expect to have the sweet joys of friendship, but our Lord has given them to me and still does so daily. Every year on the third of December my gratitude redoubles, but this year Elvire is here to embrace me. Well, not to be ungrateful I must be very good, very faithful.

At Benediction Elvire sang a hymn in honor of Saint Francis Xavier; later they treated me to some verses, music, and flowers; and they made me a throne covered with my sister's cloak. I was on the point of asking for my little song when they began to sing it. Sister Olympiade improvised two or three extra couplets, which Elvire put into rhyme, and Father Corbe laughed heartily. This morning all the Communions were offered for me, also the Mass, for I know our good Father's

²⁹ Reproachful eyes.

habits. Mother Theodore was not the least of the happy ones, for she rejoiced above all to see me in such good health.³⁰

Mother Saint Charles had offered the suggestion from Ruillé that Sister Saint Francis Xavier would probably prove of too rigorous a zeal to act as her sister's novice mistress, and Mother Theodore therefore reserved Elvire's training in essentials to herself, guiding her gently in the ways of love and peace. When it was time for her to receive the black tulle cap worn by the postulants and Monseigneur had arrived to confer it, Mother Theodore presented her name to the Bishop. Sister Saint Francis Xavier objected strenuously however saying that Elvire neither desired nor merited the *bonnet noir*. When therefore Sister Mary Eudoxie, who had been named by the Bishop, was invested with it by His Lordship, Elvire was advised to wait till some weeks later, a little humiliation which made her appreciate it deeply when at last she was permitted to wear it. "Sister Saint Francis Xavier never tires of looking at me in my new religious dress," she wrote. "She says we are more fortunate than Dame Nature who is obliged to change at every season."

Sister Mary Joseph saw more clearly from day to day that she was truly called to the religious life. Her beautiful name was the joint choice of her two superiors, and she bore it into the last of the thirty years of religious life which her sister had asked of God for her. Her serene and beaming countenance, which told of her happiness, was clouded only now and then when some slight negligence or a fault committed in fulfillment of her duties brought her to Mother Theodore's door to accuse herself in accordance with the custom of the novitiate. "Then," said Mother Theodore, "I instruct her and embrace and encourage her, and all is forgotten."³¹ This wise and experienced superior realized that God had sent to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in Sister Mary Joseph one destined to do an immense amount of good, and she trained her carefully for her future mission in the Community. "Elvire's time is coming," she wrote to Mme. Le Fer. "She is preparing herself and laying deep foundations for the edifice of her future perfection."³² Of her new postulant Mother Theodore had written her first impressions shortly after her arrival: "Elvire is here in my room now with her guitar, near the fire. . . . She has an angelic appearance, and what in my opinion is more remarkable with all her good qualities, she is charmingly simple. Everyone already loves her."³³ Elvire herself could not thank God enough for giving her as a guide a person with the Foundress's correct judgment and exalted virtue, her upright spirit, and above all her sympathetic heart.

She loves us so much, she wrote to her mother. What a heart the good God was keeping in reserve for me! What generosity in her friendship, what equality; no change, nor interruption in her affection, always the same devotedness for her beloved daughters, no little susceptibilities nor jealousies, and yet her love is so true that one is driven to think "Our Mother would give her life for me." Thank God for me, my dear mother, thank Him every day for giving me the superior I

³⁰ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 363.

³¹ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 348.

³² *L'Indiana*, p. 329.

³³ A Mme. Le Fer de la Motte [1853]. S.M.W.A.

have found at Saint Mary's. Oh, I can say with all my heart, "Quid retribuam Domino?"³⁴

Fearing lest Madame Le Fer might be uneasy regarding the Community's food, the Foundress detailed for her benefit the usual menu at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, composed as always on the frontier largely of meat. To the French people bread and wine were a meal, and with soup added, this modest repast became a dinner. The French habit of serving bread as the prime constituent of every meal followed the Sisters to America, although in the first years white bread was a luxury which the Community saw very rarely. In 1852 however excellent bread, fresh every few days, was a staple article of the diet. Meat was served three times daily except Friday, as the Saturday abstinence customary in France had been abrogated in 1840. A beef was killed every week, and the farmyard furnished an ample provision of turkey, goose, and chicken. Five thousand pounds of excellent pork, "much lighter here than in France," had been salted for the winter, and fifteen cows gave a supply of very good milk. They had also a small quantity of Bordeaux wine, and Mother Theodore was giving some to Elvire every day. This was a custom however which both priests and Sisters found it advisable to discontinue in America, and the French Sisters had quickly learned to drink coffee and tea à l'*Américaine*. "I feel convinced that this dear child will become accustomed to the food of this country as our Sisters from France have done. They could not live [on the fare] at Ruillé now."³⁵

Sister Mary Joseph was proving to be a promising sick nurse. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had been suffering from a cold with violent neuralgic pains in her head at the time of Mother Theodore's letter, and Elvire wished to be chief infirmarian, second, however, only to Sister Olympiade, who as Mother Theodore said, yielded her rights to no one. She was delighted however to share her duties with Elvire, and when the patient was convalescent, the two sisters spent some happy hours together. "They are making flowers now for Monseigneur's chapel, and they are enjoying it," added the Foundress.

A little newborn infant not far from the convent was thought to be dying, and Sister Olympiade was going to see it, hoping to send it to heaven by administering baptism according as circumstances made it possible. Sister Olympiade had aged greatly during her twelve years in America, more, said Mother Theodore, than any of the other French Sisters, and though she was only forty-six, Sister Saint Francis Xavier referred to her now and then as "old Sister Olympiade." She was still strong and vigorous, however, and was destined with Sister Mary Xavier to outlive all the others of the original band. For her expedition of mercy Sister Mary Joseph was selected as companion. Very few details of these charitable expeditions through the woods to visit the sick and dying, which made Sister Olympiade's name blessed for many years, have come down to us, but Sister Mary Joseph has recorded a typical excursion. "You will be interested in the day I spent last Monday," she wrote to her mother. When making their preparations, Sister Olympiade had charged her with the

³⁴ A Mme. Le Fer de la Motte, 2 novembre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

³⁵ *L'Indiana*, pp. 329-330.

precious privilege of administering the regenerating sacrament, and she took with her a little bottle of water which could easily be concealed in the hollow of her hand.

One may picture the young French Sister entering the Hoosier log cabin crowded with relatives and neighbors. Holding the sick baby on her lap a little aside from the others, "*tremblante mais joyeuse*," she poured some water from her flask quietly on its head, her lips moving in the sacred words of the formula. Learning that its name was Arthable, Sister Mary Joseph asked and obtained permission to call it also Joseph. "You know that since Sunday I am called Sister Mary Joseph, and I offered him to my patron saint. . . ."

"Learning of another sick child in the vicinity, we started off in our *wagine*, or old carriage, not without filling the little flask again at a spring of fresh water, and soon we were at the next house." Here Sister Mary Joseph repeated the saving ceremony with great consolation, for Sister Olympiade announced at once that the sick child could not live long with the high fever which was burning in its little cheeks. This time Sister Mary Joseph obtained the mother's permission to pour some of her "lotion" upon its head and inflamed ear. She did not now care to change the baby's names of Charles Henry which were those of two of her brothers. "I have come to bring souls to Jesus, and I was very happy over my day," she wrote. "You should have seen Sister Saint Francis Xavier at recreation when she heard my story. Her eyes shone like stars."³⁰

Meanwhile the work on the new building was suspended. Though it was under roof in November, nothing more could be done during the winter of 1852-1853. Items in Mother Theodore's accounts reveal however that John Warner, the Terre Haute carpenter, was retained all winter, employed doubtless upon the flooring and interior woodwork, the doors and stairs. Work was resumed early in March though the weather was still very cold, preparing the inside walls for plastering. The plasterer from Madison, John Donohue, began the work at the end of the month. He left Saint Mary's the first of June, his task satisfactorily completed. The tanners, having fitted the exterior of the house throughout with rainspouts, gutters, and lightning rods, left at the same time. They were replaced by the painters and glaziers, the former to be employed for many months. Though the doors were not yet hung, a dozen Sisters were preparing, as soon as the walls were dry, to use the dormitories, all sleeping upon the customary straw ticks, and at the same time some fifteen girls from the overcrowded academy were also accommodated there. Prosper Eluère was still supplying excellent iron beds, though not yet in sufficient quantity to meet the growing needs of academy and convent.

The missions were now able to contribute substantial sums which helped to meet the weekly pay roll for workmen and the large bills for all sorts of supplies, cut glass panes, hinges, gutters, paint and brushes, all of which passed through Mother Theodore's hands. These amounts with others from the dowries of several Sisters, from the increased revenues of the academy, and from small borrowings here and there, sufficed for the extensive outlay. The South was an excellent source for borrowed money,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

but the exorbitant interest rates customary in New Orleans, had prevented the Foundress from seeking funds there. Her confidence in Divine Providence had been amply rewarded:

Providence has succored us in a remarkable manner during the past year, she wrote a few weeks later. Never did a workman come for his wage without my being able to pay it. I have paid out including this year twelve thousand dollars, sixty-three thousand francs. . . . We have paid fifty thousand francs for our motherhouse. Our debts yet standing are from twenty to twenty-five thousand francs.³⁷

Easter came early³⁸ in magnificent Indiana spring weather. On Spy Wednesday evening the Community went into retreat to follow with Church "in piety, fervor, and silence" the Passion and Death of the Saviour. Anxiety was not absent however for two little girls at the academy were pronounced to be so seriously ill of pneumonia by Dr. Read that Father Corbe administered Extreme Unction on Holy Saturday. After the blessing of the font two older girls received baptism, and the next morning five made their First Communion and eighteen the customary solemn Easter duty. With the quick recovery of childhood, the two little patients were now out of danger, and in thanksgiving the Community sang a special *Regina Coeli* in the church and burned a beautiful taper before Our Lady as they had promised. The liturgical functions which the Sisters had known and loved in France could be introduced only very gradually in America. "We had the Paschal candle for the first time," noted the Foundress.³⁹ The month of Saint Joseph closed with a general Communion a few days later. "We have received many graces through his intercession," was the grateful comment in the diary.

The annual visitation of the missions was this year carried out during the intervals in the Foundress's pressing occupations connected with the building operations now going forward satisfactorily every day. In April Mother Theodore went for a week to Vincennes returning with two postulants in the Bishop's carriage. Ten days later she left with Sister Saint Francis Xavier for a brief stay of only five days in Madison. On the first day of May accompanied by Sister Olympiade she started for Fort Wayne stopping en route to examine the school in Terre Haute. On May 12 she was at home again well pleased with conditions everywhere, but she was obliged on the fourteenth to start for Evansville on business connected with the proposed foundation in that flourishing town, despite the fact that the Wabash was in one of its high floods⁴⁰ and she had to cross the bottom in a boat. On her return trip ten days later she brought "a magnificent seraphine in rosewood which Monseigneur brought us from Paris and a pretty little organ to practice on in the house."⁴¹

Thus was received at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods one of the most highly prized possessions of the early music department long prominent in musical programs and still treasured in good condition in the museum, probably the only instrument of its kind in this country and one of the few still

³⁷ A Mère Saint Charles, 25 septembre, 1853. S.M.W.A.

³⁸ March 27 in 1853.

³⁹ Community Diary.

⁴⁰ *Wabash Courier*, May 14, 1853.

⁴¹ Community Diary.

extant in the world.⁴² Fully equipped with twelve registers and giving evidence of skilled and careful workmanship, it exemplifies the final stage in the evolution of the instrument from its first appearance on the market in England in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. After a brief vogue of some twenty years, superseded entirely by the harmonium, it passed out of manufacture about 1852, the very year when Bishop de Saint-Palais saw and bought the individual specimen which had taken a prize at the Paris exposition of 1844. The Bishop evidently intended the seraphine for the new chapel then approaching completion at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, oblivious of an earlier promise he had made to secure an organ for one of his priests. Organs were at a premium to the pastors of rising churches in poor localities in Indiana in 1852.

When the seraphine arrived at Vincennes therefore and was stored temporarily in the episcopal residence, the priest in question at once put in his claim. No offer of the generous Bishop to buy him off with a gift of equivalent value in vestments or altar furnishings was of any avail, though the remembrance of the new chapel he was to dedicate during the coming summer at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods where the seraphine would serve a more useful purpose probably prevented the Bishop from handing over the instrument at once. The question was solved by one of the Vincennes priests, an accomplished musician, who gave to the pastor on his arrival to claim it, a demonstration of the seraphine's possibilities of such a character that he forthwith and forever abandoned any desire for it and gladly accepted the proffered vestments. The seraphine under an unskilled touch is capable of strident and rasping effects far removed from harmony, though under Sister Mary Eudoxie's artistic fingers it brought forth strains of heavenly beauty.

It was installed at once in the old chapel for the feast of Corpus Christi next day when "the good priest of the prairies said Mass for us and gave Benediction. They played on the little seraphine for the first time."⁴³ This was no doubt the Reverend Thomas J. Ryan, who had succeeded the Reverend George A. Hamilton, Jr., at Saint Aloysius Church at the North Arm. This excellent priest retained all his life the memory of his early associations with the saintly Foundress of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and years later, in 1863, when he died as pastor of Mattoon, Illinois, he was brought the long distance to Saint Mary's for burial, in accordance with his oft expressed wish to be in death near the saints he had known in those early years.⁴⁴

The source we have followed above gives further data on the subsequent history of the old instrument and the place it occupied in succeeding years in the atmosphere and traditions of what Booth Tarkington called "Old Saint Mary's:"

⁴² Clotilde Pilard Thomas in *The Signal*, vol. 2, no. 4, July 12, 1893, p. 13.

⁴³ Community Diary.

⁴⁴ Born at Templemore, County Tipperary, Ireland, in 1802, he died June 20, 1863, in the twenty-fifth year of his ministry. Appointed pastor of Baldwinville, as the North Arm was then called, on November 11, 1850, he was transferred to Mattoon some few years later. After his burial at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, his sister, who had been his housekeeper, lived on the convent grounds for some time, and is buried near her brother.

The seraphine passed into the possession of the Sisters, who bore it triumphantly to Saint Mary's on Wednesday, May 25, 1852. It was initiated in its services there on the next day, the feast of Corpus Christi, in the oratory of Providence, and later, on August seventh, participated in the ceremonies of blessing the then new Saint Mary's Chapel, now superseded by the magnificent Church of the Immaculate Conception. It afterward gave way to the small pipe organ, better suited to church service, which was presented by the Reverend Father Deydier, and which was destroyed by fire when Providence was burned; and the seraphine was removed to the academy, where it received a glad welcome.

Its wonderful imitation of wind instruments proved invaluable in the orchestral performances of the young lady students, and ever since then it has formed a part of our reminiscences, as do the odor of certain flowers, the massed rustle of silken sash and muslin frocks, the swaying of the multitude in the audience, and the streaks of sunlight peering through the branches that shade the windows of the commencement hall. And above them all, mingling with the voices of the past, float the stately tones of the dear old seraphine, singing its perpetual accompaniment to sweet memories, blithely mingling its tones with youth's fresh carol and saluting in melody the successions of classes as year after year cycles by. Voices yet awakening the sweet echoes of the world of today; others unused and decayed and others dead, have blended with its harmonies; and again and again new generations sing to it, each in turn vanishing into the ever-growing past.⁴⁵

The fact noted from time to time during this year that daily or Sunday Mass was celebrated now by one priest now by another, corroborates the remarks of Sister Saint Francis Xavier in one of her letters to Mother Saint Charles:

This poor Mr. Corbe, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, has severe headaches, and we are uneasy on account of his health. Indeed we are to be pitied if we lose him, for to find a more exact superior, a more devoted father, a more pious priest would, I feel, be impossible. He has not the brilliant talents which often lead to pride, but he has exactly what is needed for a community like ours in which almost all authority resides in the superior general.⁴⁶

Monseigneur had been at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for ten days to assist Father Corbe in his duties as chaplain. He had been ill since the middle of May with severe neuralgic pains in his head accompanied by deafness, and two weeks in Vincennes, where he went to consult Dr. Baty, seemed to afford but little relief. Father Lalumiere, who had often crossed the river when it was at flood stage to minister to the religious, was also ill in Vincennes, but one of the newly ordained German priests, Father Peter Leonard Brandt, came on one occasion to say Mass for the Community and Father Ryan officiated on Corpus Christi, as we have seen. Monseigneur was also ill when he reached Saint Mary's with Father Corbe at the end of May, but he quickly recovered and proceeded to act as confessor and chaplain with his usual benignant generosity. Mother Theodore was deeply concerned about the chaplain's health. He was no longer the *bon gros père*, to whom in his correspondence with Mother Theodore, Father Benoit always sent love, but had suffered much and lost considerable weight. "I fear greatly that we shall lose him . . . a real calamity for us. He is so good, so wise, so reserved. The Bishop came to see him,

⁴⁵ *The Signal*, vol. 2, no. 4, July 12, 1893, p. 13.

⁴⁶ 8 juin, 1853. S.M.W.A.

and he himself fell sick with a very severe cold. Both are however better now."⁴⁷

The anxieties and labor of caring for the diocese during the Bishop's absence had been very hard upon the excellent chaplain, hard upon his sensibilities, hard upon his physical endurance. He had planned to visit his friend Father Martin at Baton Rouge and had also been putting aside his savings for some time hoping to spend a few months with his sister and other relatives in his native Brittany, but neither project ever materialized. Seeing the urgent need of repairs upon the village church, he devoted his savings to this laudable cause and gave up permanently his long planned visit to his native land. During this year rumors had presaged Father Martin's elevation to the episcopal see of Natchitoches, Louisiana, an event which Father Corbe finally learned with certainty from the pages of the *Catholic Telegraph* in October, 1853. The two friends had long had a jocose pact that the first one raised to the episcopacy would make the other his vicar general and canon of his cathedral. Some years earlier Father Corbe had told his friend that if he were among the new bishops he could be assured of one priest who would follow him despite time and tide.⁴⁸ Father Corbe now however made no mention of a visit to Natchitoches in his letter of congratulation to the Bishop-elect, who was to be consecrated on November 30, nor did he speak of the long illness which had given so much anxiety to the Community. "All the Sisters have rejoiced at your appointment," he wrote to the new prelate. "They will pray much for you. They are all well, and the Community has grown a great deal. They have been obliged to take up their dwelling in their new house before it was finished. It is a magnificent and roomy house. I hope you will come to see it."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Aux Mères de Ruillé, 14 juin, 1853. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁸ 11 décembre, 1849. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ 17 octobre, 1853. S.M.W.A.

CHAPTER XXX

THE NEW CHAPEL FOUNDATION OF EVANSVILLE AND NORTH MADISON

"My dear Sisters, when we left our country and all who were dear to us, we found beyond the sea awaiting us in a poor log hut our God, our all, and He has never left us."

MOTHER THEODORE

SUMMER was now rapidly approaching, and the interior furnishing of the kitchen and dormitories and especially of the chapel in the new building was necessarily rushed to completion in anticipation of the mission Sisters' homecoming. Equipment for the remaining apartments was installed, however, only very gradually. Fifty *prie-dieux* and eighty plain benches, two pairs of flambeaux, and two pairs of "cylinders or globes" were among the purchases before the dedication of the chapel now scheduled for August 6, feast of the Transfiguration, the day of the opening of the retreat. Though still unfinished, the house would be habitable for the Sisters during the summer and greatly preferable to the old convent, where in June they were already "almost smothering." Mother Theodore was hoping that in their new and more spacious quarters Sister Saint Francis Xavier's recurring "smothering spells" would diminish. Describing their situation during these months to Bishop Bouvier, Sister Saint Francis Xavier explained that they were truly united, close to one another in two ways, for God had given them His spirit of charity and they had the inconvenience of their crowded quarters.¹

Early in July the Sisters began to use the kitchen in the basement of the new building. Mother Theodore's circular² inviting the missionaries to the retreat went to them about the same time. Her heart filled with love and gratitude to God for this last great benefit, their new home, she recalled to them the poor frame house where they had been received in charity twelve years earlier. "By the help of God and of the union which reigns among you, a house is here to receive you. As yet it has only the walls and roof with scarcely any furniture; but such as it is, you will love it, for it is the fruit of your labor and privations."³

The next few weeks were doubly busy though Mother Theodore had said that for two months she had hardly had time to think. When the gilt globe and cross were installed on the cupola in mid-July, the exterior of the new convent seemed complete. The effect was very pleasing. Remarkings the symbolism of the two emblems the Foundress noted in the diary some of those devout reflections which were her usual reaction especially to events of a religious nature, "The world was saved by the cross.

¹ 21 février, 1853. S.M.W.A.

² *J. and L.*, p. 353.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

Glory and honor to it. How consoling to a Christian heart to see it raised on high in the new world! O my God, grant that it may triumph." The chapel was now the main preoccupation, to have it in readiness for the Sisters' homecoming and the retreat. Airy and spacious, it ran the full width of the new building on the east adjoining the Community room which was almost the same size. The altar in a semi-circular recess was handsomely furnished by the Le Fer family and their friends. On June 22 Mother Theodore paid the duty of forty dollars on one of the periodical boxes from France, the first since Elvire's arrival at Saint Mary's. When opened on Saint Anne's day, like the others at recreation for all to enjoy, it was found to contain a beautiful monstrance "with rays and a vermilion lamb, the effect of which is charming,"⁴ the third they had received from Irma's family, some ornaments for the altar, vases, candlesticks, small lamps, pictures, altar cloths, antependia, and altar linens.

The tabernacle was transported from the old chapel for Mass for several days. Sister Mary Joseph had the privilege of lining the tabernacle of the new altar with white velvet. She also took part in preparing the hosts for the first Mass and in making the "exposition," a dainty bower of white tulle and artificial lilacs, roses, and marguerites, to enshrine the monstrance at Benediction, aided by two German Sisters⁵ who were marvels of skill and speed. They had only two days for the work after the supplies arrived from France. "I may say that the effect was charming, so fresh and gracious. Tears flowed when our beloved Saviour deigned to show Himself to us in our beautiful monstrance on our modest but very appropriate altar."⁶ For four days while the dismantling was in progress they had been without the Blessed Sacrament and as Sister Saint Francis records, their former chapel was desolate and they were like spirits wandering from place to place without knowing where to rest.⁷

The Sisters were now all at home except a few unavoidably detained on the missions. On Tuesday, August 2, the *distribution des prix* was held without the preliminary public examination, and the large assembly listened attentively to the discourse on education delivered by Mr. Benjamin M. Thomas of Vincennes. A long and very laudatory account of the exercises and a paragraph on "the pleasant hop at Buntin's Hotel" in compliment to the young ladies and their parents on their way home appeared in the current issue of the *Wabash Courier*. The writer singled out the compositions in French, German, and English, and the musical numbers for special commendation. "Indeed everything demonstrates that this institution is in the first class of establishments of education in the country," he continued, "and I can safely assert that none in the West is more entitled to public patronage."⁸ In the long list of premiums which closed the article, Jennie Buell of Lawrenceburg, Elizabeth Dill of Indianapolis, Mary Hinde of Madison, and Mary Jane Campbell of Washington won first places.

Next day the beloved statue of the Madonna, M. de la Bertaudière's

⁴ Community Diary. S.M.W.A.

⁵ Probably Sister Maurice and Sister Mary James.

⁶ *L'Indiana*, p. 339.

⁷ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 383.

⁸ *Wabash Courier*.

ex-voto gift on Mother Theodore's recovery in 1841, which had been in the village church since 1844, was, with Father Corbe's permission and to the great joy of the entire Community, brought back to a niche prepared above and behind the altar in the new chapel. Up to the feast of the Transfiguration the moving continued. At last they were leaving "the miserable cabin in which they had been shut up so long," as the Bishop had called it.

The Sisters felt happy beyond measure, records Mother Cecilia. Gladness was in every countenance. . . . We went through the house and looked at all the rooms . . . and in the evening we met in the chapel. . . . Mass had been said in it but on a temporary altar, and the Consecration was only for Mass and the communicants, but now all was completed. . . . The little sanctuary looked lovely; in our eyes the altar was beautiful, and we felt happy beyond all power of words to convey. . . . At six in the evening the religious exercises of that hour were performed in the new chapel followed by the first meal taken in the new domicile and the first night slept within its walls.⁹

On Sunday, August 7, Monseigneur, assisted by Father Corbe and Father Ernest Audran from Vincennes, said the first Mass in the chapel and blessed it. Father Corbe celebrated the first High Mass and officiated at Vespers and Benediction in the afternoon. "O my God," prayed the Foundress, "grant that all who dwell in this house may love Thee much, may love one another, and may never forget why they came here. Grant that we may all be reunited in heaven."¹⁰ Next day Sister Saint Francis Xavier shared their happiness with her family who had contributed so generously to the furnishing and adornment of the altar:

Yesterday our statue of the Blessed Virgin was carried in triumph to our new chapel. Oh! if you could have seen it encircled by branches of lilies. She appeared really happy to return to us again. The Sisters were much affected at the sight of the beautiful display of white flowers and our altar so richly ornamented. Our chapel has been blessed under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph. . . . Yesterday, when the Bishop pronounced the words of consecration, our dear Lord took up His dwelling in our new chapel. How we wept! He has followed us in all our career—our cabin and our frame house. Now He resides in a beautiful brick house, but without Him how sad it would be! . . . You cannot . . . understand our joy. I myself was overcome, and the Bishop and our good Father Corbe were much affected. Abbé Audran was so excited that he had an attack of fever. Ah! he and we, children of misery and distress, are able to appreciate such happiness.

Mother Theodore was so happy that she was constantly afraid she was going to say her *Nunc dimittis*. We compare the past with the present. Twelve years ago a little plank covered with a piece of blue calico supported the Sacred Host in a tottering cabin. O my Jesus! how good You are, how good You are. But how fortunate are we to afford You a better lodging! Abbé Collet's beautiful candlesticks ornamented the altar on which were Natalia's vases filled with Cecile's and Joseph's Easter daisies. The alb and chasuble were given by Alphonse. Sister Mary Joseph had the privilege of lining the tabernacle, and she will tell mother what more she did. I painted on the tabernacle of the old church a heart near the lock, and another on the little column; one was my mother's, the other mine. Indeed, all our hearts are well imprinted in the Heart of Jesus.¹¹

⁹ MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 77.

¹⁰ Community Diary.

¹¹ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 383.

Mother Theodore herself found the chapel all she had hoped and desired:

We will send you a picture of the interior as soon as we can make one, she wrote to Ruillé. The chapel is nicely ornamented. . . . Monseigneur gave a lovely ciborium, silver, like the ostensorium. We also have silver candlesticks. It is the prettiest little chapel I have seen anywhere since I left France. Though so beautiful, it is nevertheless very simple. We will send also a picture of our house with this letter. . . . It is said to be the most beautiful building in the State.¹²

"Everyone is happy in seeing what the Lord has done for us," she noted in the diary, "and especially that we can offer Him a more suitable habitation. Our hearts are truly joyful, filled with gratitude and fervor."

Nevertheless, she was deeply disappointed that there would be no Jesuit to give the retreat. "One thing is wanting, a Jesuit for the retreat." Monseigneur had applied too late, as the Jesuits of the Missouri province were by the 1850's much sought after as retreat masters. The great spiritual benefit which had accrued to the Community from retreats given by apostolic men like Fathers d'Hoop and Damen caused the disappointment to be keenly felt. "I thought the retreat would be a failure, and I looked upon that as a great chastisement from heaven," wrote the Foundress. Conscience stricken, Monseigneur did his best to atone for his oversight; before he arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for the ceremony of blessing the chapel, he had arranged for Father Deydier to follow him at once to assist with Father Corbe in giving the conferences of the retreat in the new chapel. The results were such as to satisfy Mother Theodore completely, proving as she acknowledged later, that in similar matters we must depend more upon God than upon men. "I have never seen the Sisters better disposed. All received their obediences with perfect submission and although we were obliged to make some changes on account of the opening of the two new establishments, scarcely one Sister was seen to weep."¹³

At the close of the retreat with the usual impressive ceremonies Monseigneur conferred the religious habit upon ten postulants, among them two whom he had brought from Europe, Sister Mary Joseph and Sister Mary Eudoxie, and Francis Thralls's daughter, Sister Isidore.¹⁴ Seven novices, all of whom had met the two conditions the Community was now requiring, three complete years of novitiate and twenty-one years of age,¹⁵ were professed at the same time.¹⁶ The vocation of the two little lace-makers was still doubtful, and as we know, only one of them persevered. On the morrow Sister Saint Francis Xavier stole a few minutes from her busy day to communicate her joy to Elvire's director, Abbé Collet at Saint Servan:

A word—yes, a word of joy and happiness. Our child has received the holy habit; she has left off the garments of the world to clothe herself with the livery of Jesus,

¹² A Mère Saint Charles, 25 septembre, 1853. S.M.W.A.

¹³ Community Diary.

¹⁴ Also Sister Mary Ann, Sister Saint Felix, Sister Ann Joseph, Sister Saint Paul, Sister Ofedia, Sister Patrick, and Sister Véronique.

¹⁵ Some of the American Bishops wished to postpone the profession of American novices to the age of twenty-five. (Godecker, *Simon Bruté de Rémur*, p. 301).

¹⁶ Sister Maurice, Sister Louise, Sister Agatha, Sister Elizabeth, Sister Helena, Sister Roseann, and Sister Saint Ange.

poor and despised. How you would have wept for joy to see her, so modest and pure, at the foot of the altar! I made an offering to God for you of this your spiritual daughter. I offered her for my mother, my sisters, for all those whom He has given me and who know how to appreciate so great a happiness. Indeed, to present such a victim was a precious favor. Today, as I beheld her under her black veil, I said to myself: "Do I see her with my own eyes?" Mother Theodore was, I think, as happy as I. Father Corbe, on seeing her in her new costume could only say: "Poor Sister Mary Joseph!" Father Bishop thinks she resembles me still more since she has the habit.¹⁷

The yearly appointments or obedience list carefully preserved from the first years, did not till 1853 include the motherhouse and the academy. For that year it gives a full presentation of the personnel of the Community thirteen years after its foundation, dispersed in eight houses up and down Indiana.

TABLEAU DES ETABLISSEMENTS ¹⁸

Jasper

Sr. Agnes, Sr. Saint Michel, Sr. Clara.

Vincennes, Asile des Filles

Sr. Mary Margaret, Sr. Mary Xavier, Sr. Philomene, Sr. Bonaventure, Sr. Mary Anne, Sr. Saint Felix, Sr. Matilda.

Vincennes, Asile des Garçons

Sr. Joachim, Sr. Mary Therese, Sr. Monique, Sr. Emmanuel.

Fort Wayne

Sr. Saint Vincent, Sr. Mary Celestia, Sr. Gabriella, Sr. Felicité, Sr. Isidore, Sr. Lawrence, Sr. Mélanie.

Madison (en ville)

Sr. Basilide, Sr. Maria, Sr. Saint Jean, Sr. Mary Angèle, Sr. Ann Joseph.

Terre Haute

Sr. Augustine, Sr. Caroline, Sr. Mary Antoinette, Sr. Clotilde.

Evansville

Sr. Anastasie, Sr. Alphonse, Sr. Saint Elizabeth, Sr. Saint Paul.

Nord Madison

Sr. Catherine, Sr. Louise.

Au Pensionnat de Saint Mary's

Sr. Mary Cecilia, Sr. Saint Urbain, Sr. Maurice, Sr. Josephine, Sr. Saint Charles, Sr. Victoire (pour la musique), Sr. Mary Eudoxie (musique), Sr. Mary James (musique), Sr. Mary Joseph (idem et Français).

Pour le travail, Sr. Therese, Sr. Lucy, Sr. Helene, Sr. Benedicta, Sr. Ophidia, Sr. Véronique.

Maison Mère

Notre Mère, Sr. Saint Francis Xavier, Sr. Olympiade, Sr. Mary Magdalen, Sr. Martina, Sr. Mary Ambrose, Sr. Agatha, Sr. Pauline, Sr. Ann, Sr. Martha, Sr. Rose, Sr. Patrick, Sr. Roseann, Sr. Saint Ange.

The Community had now been for some time in a position to open additional schools. Mother Theodore had planned an establishment in Lafayette the previous year, as has been noted, in response to the urgent requests of various groups of interested persons, but the conditions were unfavorable. "We have many postulants, and there are a good many Sisters who could be sent on mission. There are places also suitable for

¹⁷ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 367.

¹⁸ Still preserved in the Foundress's handwriting.

establishments," wrote Father Corbe in June, 1852, to his friend Father Martin. "What is lacking is the priest to whom a certain number of these good children can be confided."¹⁹ Bishop de Saint-Palais's constant desire was to see the Sisters of Providence in every possible locality in his diocese. The *Metropolitan Catholic Almanac* for 1852 refers to the "urgent call" for them from different places.

Everything now pointed towards Evansville. Mother Theodore was willing, even anxious, and the circumstances seemed desirable. Bishop Bruté had considered Evansville in 1838 when selecting locations possible for schools.²⁰ Father Deydier was looking to Emmitsburg for Sisters of Charity for Evansville that same year. "Yesterday I purchased a beautiful lot," he wrote to Mother Rose, "for the erection of a church, but not only for that purpose, otherwise one half would have been sufficient."²¹ In 1839 he was accompanied on his return from his first collecting tour by a young man from Baltimore, Michael Byrne, who began at once to act as schoolmaster. Later Mrs. R. Fergus taught the children in the church basement. Bishop de Saint-Palais had bought the house known as the Griffith home²² in Evansville in 1850, which he offered to Mother Theodore. This was no doubt the house of which Father Deydier had written to her in September, 1848,²³ situated next the church and for sale at six thousand dollars. An earlier price was four thousand, but Bishop de la Hailandière had not been interested at that time. Five hundred dollars down and the rest in eight years at five per cent would secure the house, and this zealous priest saw an opportunity for the purchase of an establishment for Sisters in Evansville. Much benefit will result from a good school for young ladies. His only uneasiness is for the first and perhaps the second year till the school is established. He intends adding a lateral chapel to the church where Sisters and pupils may assist at divine service and perform their devotions at all hours of the day without going on the street. Can she consider it?²⁴ At that time the impending purchase of the Madison house and the building of Saint Vincent's in Terre Haute precluded any additional outlay.

Some three years later he made another and more insistent plea in an earnest letter written February 9, 1852. He knew, of course, that the motherhouse, involved in an expensive building operation, could not incur further liabilities, but the school will pay for itself and if not, he will be responsible for the deficit. The Methodists and Presbyterians are projecting the opening of a seminary. The people are not satisfied with the existing schools, and many Protestants would probably send their daughters to a good Sisters' school. Many Catholic children, ruined by attending the public schools, will probably now never make their First Communion though they could still be saved. Houses are in great demand although new ones are going up every year. He knows of one, however. The prices of lots are high, and not hundreds but thousands of dollars are necessary

¹⁹ 8 juin, 1852. S.M.W.A.

²⁰ To Camille Bruté at Rennes, July 18, 1838. N.D.U.A.

²¹ Bruté-Seton Correspondence, p. 512.

²² John G. Iglehart, *An Account of Vanderburgh County* in Logan Esarey, *History of Indiana*, (B. F. Bowen, Indianapolis, 1918), vol. 3, p. 171.

²³ 9 septembre, 1848. S.M.W.A.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

for purchase. His congregation is poor, not one affluent family, and he has a debt of five thousand dollars and interest to pay. This estimable pastor concludes by some data upon the development and conditions in the town itself. "No city on the river is so quiet as Evansville, and there is no indication of a recurrence of the anti-Catholic disturbances of some years past. The number of Catholics is growing daily and their influence augments accordingly. . . . In the opinion of all visitors to Evansville, it is destined to become the principal city of Indiana."²⁵ His final request is for Mother Theodore to come and look over the situation.

Her decision was evidently to open the desired house during the following year, and the trip to Vincennes in May was for consultation with Monseigneur as to its possibility. Nevertheless a certain apathy seized upon the proceedings almost from the beginning, and when the particular council met at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods during the retreat in August, the final determination to undertake the new mission was taken with considerable misgiving. Monseigneur offered the house which he had bought for six thousand dollars still unpaid, and the monthly interest amounted to \$175. His straitened circumstances made it a practical certainty that the Community must eventually assume all the indebtedness.²⁶ Immediate repairs were necessary to render the house habitable, and the doubtful future was not encouraging. As the public schools were already in operation, the work of the Sisters would certainly meet with obstacles, but to conform to His Lordship's wishes and to keep the children from the godless schools, the establishment was finally agreed upon.

Located on a great inward bend of *la Belle Rivière* at the foot of the old Red Banks Indian trail northward, on the reverse fold of which rises the town of Henderson, Kentucky, some one hundred and twenty miles as the crow flies from its merging with the Mississippi, Evansville seems ideally situated for growth and prosperity. Though the region was not wrested from the Indians by Harrison till 1804,²⁷ the adventurous Kentucky pioneers had for years been crossing the willow-fringed Ohio, braving the resentment and hostility of the Indian owners of the rich woodlands where game and pure water abounded. Despite its favorable location, pointed out by the early traveler, Edmund Dana, in 1817,²⁸ the development of the region was very slow, and in 1830 all of Vanderburgh County had a population of only 2,610, less than half the number in Vigo County.

Even as late as 1850 the largest towns in Indiana were Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Lafayette, Madison, New Albany, and Terre Haute. All had their growing quota of immigrants to swell the Catholic population, and all eventually were provided with schools staffed by Sisters of Providence. In the 1850 decade, however, the phenomenal growth of Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and Terre Haute, all of which more than doubled their population, was outstripped by Evansville which almost quadrupled, rising

²⁵ 9 février, 1852. S.M.W.A.

²⁶ Minutes of the Particular Council. S.M.W.A.

²⁷ Esarey, *History of Indiana*, vol. 1, p. 272, map.

²⁸ Harlow Lindley, *Indiana as Seen by Early Travelers*, (Indiana Historical Commission, Indianapolis, 1916), p. 212.

from 3,235 in 1850 to 11,484 in 1860.²⁹ Indianapolis had not been a field of special Catholic growth. It had, however, early attracted the attention of Bishop de la Hailandière, and Father Vincent Bacquelin, who was appointed to that vicinity in 1837, had petitioned for a colony of Sisters in 1846. Evansville, however, with its extraordinary Catholic development was evidently marked out as the logical place to establish a new school.

The history of Catholicism in Evansville hardly antedates the time of Bishop Bruté, though Bishop Flaget on his missionary tours, accompanied by the Reverend Robert Abell, had celebrated Mass there. The Austrian Redemptorist, Father Peter Czackert, stationed at Sainte Marie, Illinois, from 1838 to 1840, also visited Evansville,³⁰ and probably the Kentucky missionaries, Fathers Stephen Theodore Badin and Elisha Durbin, who ministered to the scattered Catholics of southwestern Indiana.

In 1836 when Bishop Bruté was traveling westward with his colony of young priests and clerics from Europe, he delegated three of the number, the Eudist Father Stanislas Buteux and the two seminarians, Michael Shawe and Benjamin Petit, to accompany the heavy baggage of the party from Pittsburgh down the Ohio to Evansville. On their arrival there in mid-August, 1836, they were hospitably received and entertained at the principal hotel in the city, the Mansion House on the northwest corner of First and Locust Streets, by the proprietor Francis X. Linck, the pioneer Catholic of Evansville, in whose house Father Buteux celebrated Mass next morning.

The Linck family in 1836 was the only Catholic family in Evansville. Francis Linck, a native of Stockheim in Württemberg, Germany, where he was born in 1774, had come to Evansville from Tennessee some years earlier and proved himself all during these years the mainstay of religion in the city. The priests who came to Evansville, and Mother Theodore and her Sisters on several occasions were welcomed at the Mansion House, and Father Deydier enjoyed, during his first months as pastor of Evansville, "the polite and charitable attentions" of this excellent family. Francis Linck's daughter, Augusta³¹ entered the novitiate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1842 as we have seen.³² He lived till August 23, 1863, and is buried in the Catholic cemetery of Evansville.

From 1836 on, Bishop Bruté included Evansville in his missionary plans, and Father Deydier was sent there arriving May 3, 1837. Next morning, feast of the Ascension, some twenty Catholics assisted at his Mass in Mr. Linck's house. The number of Catholics was gradually augmented by the people of the city and by new arrivals, as in early America bigotry and calumny often drove Catholics to disown their faith, and the coming of a priest roused their conscience and their courage. In November Father Deydier returned as permanent pastor and took up that heroic life of

²⁹ Esarey, *History of Indiana*, vol. 2, p. 980.

³⁰ Data furnished by the Reverend John F. Byrne, C.S.S.R., Baltimore, Md.

³¹ Another daughter was the first American postulant of the Sisters of Notre Dame, and this pioneer Catholic family is represented today by the two Jesuit Fathers John P. and William M. Markoe, and the superior of the Visitation Convent in Saint Louis, Sister Anne Marie Markoe and her sister, Sister Mary Joseph, all four great grandchildren of Francis X. Linck.

³² Chapter X.

hardship and apostolic labor, the remembrance of which is one of the treasures of the history of Catholic Evansville.

By the utmost exertion he secured a church site on Second Street between Main and Sycamore Streets in the autumn of 1839, and on August 5, 1840, the Prince Bishop Charles de Forbin-Janson of Toul and Nancy in France, who had stopped at Vincennes during a missionary tour of the United States and Canada, laid the cornerstone assisted by the Very Reverend Dominic Bach, one of the superiors of the Mercedarian order, who was his traveling companion, and the Kentucky missionary, Father Stephen Theodore Badin. By the late autumn of 1841 the church structure was under roof and the basement plastered and ready for divine service. It was dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. No mystery of the life of the Blessed Virgin was more popular in early America than the Assumption. Bishop Carroll was consecrated on that feast, had given its name to his cathedral in Baltimore, and made the day the patronal feast of his diocese.³³ It was made the national Catholic holyday of obligation in the Baltimore Synod of 1791.³⁴ Evansville's church was the third in the diocese of Vincennes to bear this appellation, the old church at Floyd Knobs and the first church at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods having borne it earlier.

As the resources of the little group of fifty families were now exhausted, Father Deydier departed at once upon his second collecting tour in the East, leaving the young Alsatian priest Roman Weinzoepfeln, his assistant, in charge of Evansville and its missions. During the furious outbreak of anti-Catholic bigotry which marked the pastor's absence, the names of several estimable Catholic families, later closely associated with the history of the Sisters of Providence at Evansville and at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, are outstanding: the Heinrich brothers,³⁵ Francis Linck and his son, Francis, Jr., to whose efforts was due the preservation of the church from looting by the mob; William Hughes,³⁶ and the Vincennes attorney Benjamin Thomas.

In 1839 Father Deydier had secured rent free for three years a log hut on the corner of Chestnut and Canal Streets which he used for church and dwelling. Here it was that the Foundresses of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods en route to Vincennes had met him on their arrival in Evansville on October 5, 1840, as has already been noted.³⁷ Father Deydier's ragged appearance led Mother Theodore to take him at first for an object of charity.³⁸ Corn bread was his only food, his poor cabin serving for church, home, and school, his bed a box, or when on missionary duty, some straw or hay or the ground under a tree. The sight of the good priest's destitution and the recital of his privations amazed and saddened the French Sisters who had never seen anything comparable to it.

Later Mother Theodore met him again in March, 1844, on her return

³³ Guilday, *History of the Councils of Baltimore*, p. 68.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

³⁵ Grandfather and granduncle of Minnie Henrich, '07.

³⁶ Father of Mary and Louise Hughes, '60's, and grandfather of Maude Hughes Morton, '87-8, Mary Hughes Schwanecke, '94-5, Emelia Hughes Chopin, '92, and Marie Hughes, '93-5.

³⁷ Chapter IV.

³⁸ *J. and L.*, p. 53.

from France. Accompanied by Julienne Cheminant, later Sister Lawrence, the Foundress arrived in Evansville at midnight on the eve of the feast of the Annunciation. They were met by Mr. Linck, and the next morning Mrs. Linck, one of Father Deydier's converts, accompanied the two religious to Mass in the brick church still unplastered. They had been summoned to the services by a small brass bell brought to America in 1820 which had served for twenty years to announce, as was customary, the hours of meals at a local hotel.³⁹ After Mass they entered "the room of the servant of God," where they saw with deep edification the box which served as his bed and the little stove upon which he baked his single daily meal of corn bread. Mother Theodore at this time was happy to be able to share with him the altar linens and ornaments she had received in France.

During all this time immigrants, especially Germans, had been settling in increasing numbers in Evansville and the vicinity. The young Irish priest, Father Patrick McDermott, was assistant pastor of the Assumption Church after 1849, and in the previous year a Hungarian priest, one of Father Kundek's recruits, the Reverend Francis X. Kutassy, had arrived in Indiana and was made pastor of the German Catholic congregation. A church site was at once secured, and Bishop de Saint-Palais laid the cornerstone of Holy Trinity Church on Trinity Sunday, 1849. In 1851 it was completed and fully furnished. A school was also built where the boys of the parish were taught by a German schoolmaster, Mr. Edward Drewer for many years after the Sisters of Providence arrived in Evansville.

The Evansville Germans have done more than anyone in the diocese, wrote Father DuPontavice to Bishop de la Hailandière in 1851. They have bought an enormous lot, built a church 160 x 80 feet, have a tower forty-eight feet higher than the one in Vincennes, and received only two hundred and fifty dollars from the Bishop. Poor Mr. Kutachi [Kutassy] is still their pastor. I think you know this Magyar priest. . . . I forgot to tell you that Marcile built the German church and tower in Evansville. He has made a prodigious name for himself through the country.⁴⁰

Father Kutassy's zeal and charity were a fitting foil to the heroic life of privation led by Father Deydier. The German people of Evansville esteemed their pastor at his true worth. His charity was proverbial. He emptied his pockets at every sick call among the poor and shared with them his last penny. He died while the children of the parish were reciting the Rosary for him in the adjacent church, possessed of exactly sixteen cents and was buried at the expense of his people.⁴¹ Both the Catholic parishes of the city were now well established, and both parishes had been carrying on schools under secular teachers. Both were to share equally in the school to be opened by the Sisters of Providence.

Evansville, incorporated as a city since 1819,⁴² was prosperous and growing in 1853. The steamboat era, at its peak during the years before and after the Civil War, brought freight and passengers to the river towns. The Wabash and Erie Canal, finished the very year of the Sisters' arrival, was for some time a further impulse to prosperity adding the Indiana

³⁹ Presented probably by Francis X. Linck.

⁴⁰ Du Pontavice Collection, 27 janvier, 1851. N.D.U.A.

⁴¹ Remembrances of Sister Mary Avellino.

⁴² *Indiana, a Guide to the State*, (W.P.A. Writers' Project, Oxford University Press, N. Y., 1941), p. 188.

market from the north to the river trade. The canal was already flowing through the city along Canal and Fifth Streets, the boats floating slowly under numerous bridges to the basin on the present site of the court house. The first through boat from Lake Erie to the Ohio River, the *Pennsylvania*, had arrived on July 28. The railroad from Princeton, later called the C. and E. I., reached Evansville about this time (1852), and in the same year Jacques Roquet, who had been established in Evansville for some years, began to build his handsome court house which was completed in June, 1855.⁴³

The canal boats running between Terre Haute and Evansville offered a direct route to the four foundresses, who left Saint Mary's on August 19, accompanied by Mother Theodore and Sister Basilide. Sister Anastasie,⁴⁴ now an experienced local superior, in addition to her duties as head of the school was to conduct high school classes and give lessons in music, drawing and painting, and needlework. Sister Alphonse, a highly competent German teacher, was to have charge of the German girls' school, and Sister Elizabeth, newly professed, and Sister Saint Paul, a novice, were to teach the English classes. Difficulties and disappointments foreseen only in part beset the enterprise from the start. In view of the enthusiastic welcome the Sisters had received elsewhere, the attitude of the Catholic people of Evansville was disconcerting. Some were indifferent, others even hostile, deeming the coming of the Sisters premature.⁴⁵ "But for Mother Theodore's determined character, the foundation of Evansville would never have been made."⁴⁶ The school was being founded at the wish of the Bishop, however, and Father Deydier, though he had no illusions upon the situation, knew the Sisters and felt evidently that they would eventually meet with success.⁴⁷

No preparations, however, had been made for their coming. The Griffith home next the church had been hurriedly vacated and was in immediate need of cleaning and repairs. Not a single piece of furniture was in it. On the night of August 22, their first in the city, the Sisters found hospitality with some of the parishioners. The next day they began to clean the house and for a week slept on straw on the floor, "devoured by gnats and other insects which are thick along the Ohio."⁴⁸ Mother Theodore spent two hundred dollars at once purchasing enough furniture to render the house habitable, and the four young Sisters went to work with a will. They were accustomed to privations, and the inspiring words and ex-

⁴³ Jean Marcile, who had been in charge of Bishop de la Hailandière's building operations at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and elsewhere, had also located in Evansville but had perished with two of his children of cholera in 1851.

⁴⁴ Aunt of Sister Mary Gertrude Brown and Sister Mary Borromeo Brown and greataunt of Sister Francis de Sales Russell and Sister Mary Theodore Russell.

⁴⁵ MS. notes by a Sister [probably Sister Alice Clare] lent by Miss Minnie Henrich.

⁴⁶ Book of the Establishments. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁷ Father Deydier was an accomplished musician and was said to have taught music in Albany, N. Y. before his ordination. He built the first pipe organ installed at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in the chapel built by Mother Mary Cecilia in 1863. He composed a Mass for mixed voices and a litany of the Blessed Virgin often sung by the Sisters on feast days. The manuscripts of both were lost in the fire of 1889, though the litany was afterwards reproduced from memory and sung before High Mass on Sundays for many years.

⁴⁸ Community Diary.

ample of their saintly Mother made the hard beginnings a joy. The high school pupils were to be taught in the convent, but the damp and gloomy basement of the church was not an ideal location for the grade school. Sister Elizabeth and Sister Saint Paul, however, soon won the hearts of their Irish and American pupils, and the good German burghers of Evansville discovered that Sister Alphonse, far from displaying the ineptitude they had expected, was representative of the best traditions of Catholic Bavaria both for learning and piety. They had never dreamed that the Sisters could compete on equal terms with the public schools.

The school opened on September 5. "The worldly wise had laughed when they saw the poor beginnings, no desks, no benches, not a single book, and sixty children, mostly poor, on the list. Nevertheless, the Sisters gave complete satisfaction, and those who were at first most opposed to the school became its warmest friends. The reason the Sisters did not receive the right welcome in the beginning was that the people knew very little of the Sisters and their capabilities as teachers."⁴⁹ "The Germans of the place," noted Mother Theodore, "have been very kind to us, especially their pastor, Reverend Father Cutachi [Kutassy]. May God reward him."⁵⁰ They "collected in a short time the sum of one hundred dollars which in those days was a great deal of money."⁵¹ The children numbered eighty with four high school pupils the first week, and before the end of September nearly one hundred were enrolled, almost all Catholics, and all in urgent need of the daily and hourly training in the knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ to which the Sisters' educational system was dedicated.

They were located in the heart of Catholic Evansville surrounded by excellent Catholic people. Directly across the street was Heinrich Brothers' grocery store, and Mr. William Hughes's first dry goods store was around the corner. Gradually the difficulties in the school wore away, and Saint Joseph's Academy, as the high school was called, far from suffering from competition from the public schools, as Mother Theodore had anticipated, found in a short time its only rival in the best of the private seminaries which, as the public schools gained favor very slowly, were still flourishing. The drawing and painting and music lessons, the tuition in German and French, and the fancy needlework and artificial flower construction, which the Sisters gave so expertly after school hours, soon attracted the patronage of the prominent Protestant families of Evansville, many of whom sent their daughters to the "Catholic seminary." Iglehart in his *Account of Vanderburgh County* bears witness to the excellence of the teaching of these popular branches evidenced by "copy books in beautiful script, pencil sketches, and fine needlework," preserved years later by the children of these early pupils.⁵²

At her visitation in June, 1854, Mother Theodore, no casual observer, found that the pupils had made "surprising progress."⁵³ The next year

⁴⁹ *Address—Kalender der Hl. Dreifaltigkeits-Gemeinde zu Evansville* (1883) von F. B. Lubberman.

⁵⁰ Community Diary.

⁵¹ Mother Anastasie's notes.

⁵² P. 172.

⁵³ Community Diary.

six Sisters were needed for the increased enrollment, and Mother Theodore sent Sister Felicité, who could assist Sister Alphonse, in case of need, with the German pupils, and Sister Philomene, who was to teach with Sister Anastasie in the high school. The young superior became greatly beloved in Evansville, and when she left in 1856 to become superior of the academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, the school was well launched on a career of success which has continued to the present day.

In spite of the lowering cloud of the public school movement, the schools of the Sisters of Providence had been very much frequented and were very flourishing during the late 1840's and the first years of the 1850 decade. Especially was this true of Madison after Sister Basilide became superior and after the purchase by the Community of the house on Third Street and Broadway where the first Mass in the town had been celebrated⁵⁴ and which had been occupied by the Sisters from the first years in Madison. Father Sorin passing through the city in 1848, had been favorably impressed⁵⁵ by the *distribution des prix* of Saint Anne's Academy,⁵⁶ and Father Hippolyte DuPontavice, who had succeeded Bishop de Saint-Palais as pastor in November, 1847, described the first commencement under his regime in one of his regular letters to Bishop de la Hailandière in France:

On the twenty-first of the same month [July] we had the exhibition of the young ladies of the academy before a crowd of the most distinguished people in Madison. The children played a comedy which I had translated for them from the French. They were overwhelmed⁵⁷ with applause. The compositions and the pieces of music sung or played on the piano had no less success. Elizabeth Griffin carried off the palm as usual, but all went so well that everyone was enchanted. I feel convinced that next year the Sisters will have more than a hundred Protestant pupils. The Mother was here. . . . It seems she is going to give us six Sisters.⁵⁸

He had nothing but commendation for his school and the teachers in every letter to Mother Theodore. Towards the end of this scholastic year he had written to her:

I say nothing of your holy daughters. They write to you probably and inform you of their concerns, but perhaps they do not tell you how fatigued and exhausted they are and how they are rejoicing to see the moment arrive when it will be given them to seek repose near your motherly heart. The examinations have gone off admirably.⁵⁹

During the next scholastic year⁶⁰ he reported the school "more flourishing than ever," and Mother Theodore had occasion to note its success and the favorable attitude of the prominent Protestant families with the disappearance of anti-Catholic bias in prejudiced Madison, where the Sisters in the past had suffered so much:

⁵⁴ Thomas P. Conry, S.J., *Saint Michael's Church, Madison, Indiana* (Loyola University M.A. Thesis, Chicago), p. 15.

⁵⁵ A Mother Theodore, 23 juillet, 1848. S.M.W.A..

⁵⁶ Later called Holy Angels Academy.

⁵⁷ *couvertes*.

⁵⁸ DuPontavice Collection, 9 août, 1848.

⁵⁹ A Mother Theodore, 3 juillet, 1848. S.M.W.A..

⁶⁰ Du Pontavice Collection, 22 novembre, 1848.

In spite of everything, dear Mother Mary, I believe you will rejoice to see that your little colony is now organized and is apparently destined to do a permanent good in this country, thus fulfilling the end for which you sent us here. . . . Everywhere our schools are prospering. We are going to begin classes here [Madison] with a hundred pupils. More than eighty have already entered, and we opened only yesterday. There are about thirty Protestants, among whom a dozen are taking music lessons. Music is the fashion here, a fortunate thing for us, as it enables us to live. We get thirty, forty, and even fifty francs a quarter for teaching this branch; the other subjects bring much less. How much a good French musician would do here!

What we have gained in the esteem of the Protestants is astonishing. Their prejudices disappear one after the other. They esteem our holy religion, and defend it against those who speak ill of it. Yesterday we went to pay a visit to one of the principal personages of the town whose three little girls are in our school.⁶¹ The Governor of Indiana was there.⁶² We are acquainted with this magistrate; he has always shown himself kind towards our Institution. He remained with us, and I took occasion to thank him for a favor he had granted us. In the course of the conversation I was not a little surprised to hear the gentleman whom we were visiting espouse warmly with the Governor the interests of the Catholic Church. Had he been a priest, even a bishop, he could not have done better. I hope the good God will shed His merciful light upon these poor Americans who have such fine qualities. . . . Pray for all of them.⁶³

The city at this period was sharing in the rising tide of immigration, and the increased Catholic population made up mostly of Irish and German immigrants had at once been reflected in Saint Michael's school. Though most of the newcomers were poor, some were in easy circumstances, and the pastor welcomed in particular a few excellent French families.⁶⁴ The generous devotedness of the Sisters in caring for the cholera patients had been universally commended. The epidemic died out speedily, and by the first days of August, 1849, the general health in Madison was excellent. "The doctors are almost *désolés*," commented Father Du Pontavice. "My own health was reestablished in a week, and since then I have been perfectly well. Our good humor, the absence of fear and especially the help of God, sustained us in those somewhat trying times."⁶⁵ One inevitable result of the cholera felt everywhere, however, was the large number of homeless orphans and destitute families. To the care of these dependents and especially the children, Father DuPontavice began to turn his every energy, his income, and every penny he could raise. "I hope my poor Irishmen will be obliged to take up a collection to pay my funeral expenses when I die. I ask nothing more," he wrote. "I am in a position where others could accumulate cash. . . . I would be grieved to possess a penny at my death."⁶⁶

Using his influence with the municipal authorities of Madison, he succeeded in securing additional funds for the education of his poor children, counting in June, 1852, one hundred and twenty-five boys and some months

⁶¹ Michael Graham Bright, grandfather of Mary Korbly McNutt, '88.

⁶² The Hon. James Whitcomb.

⁶³ A Mère Marie, 5 septembre, 1848. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁴ Among them the Prenat family, which later gave several students to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

⁶⁵ DuPontavice Collection, 19 septembre, 1849.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18 janvier, 1850.

later, a still larger number of girls also. By October, 1852, he had secured six hundred dollars yearly to devote to this laudable purpose. He was thus enabled to engage a schoolmaster for the older boys.⁶⁷ On the part of the authorities this arrangement, while apparently advantageous, led to a desire to inspect the Sisters' school and finally to substitute other texts for the ones prepared under Catholic auspices. At this point Mother Theodore took alarm and wrote to Sister Basilide at once. "No matter what the mayor may tell you . . . never consent to take our books away from the Catholic children. . . . I would rather throw the money [paid for their tuition] into the river than expose the faith of our children."⁶⁸ An attempt to compel the Sisters, contrary to Indiana law, to pay taxes the previous year had been checked by the Foundress's firmness.⁶⁹ She still had in such matters the advice and assistance of the Community's old friend, the Vincennes attorney, Mr. Benjamin Thomas, although he was, through the influence of United States Senator Jesse D. Bright of Madison, the next year to be appointed Attorney General for Indiana.

The matter of the textbooks lapsed for some time, and the Foundress thought that all was well. Sister Basilide's over-complaisant weakness led her, however, to yield at least momentarily on this important point and merited in the following December another letter even more peremptory than the first:

Is it true then that upon your own authority, without asking anyone, you have changed the books of the Catholic children? . . . I am so distressed about this affair that I cannot speak of anything else today. I will be happy and shall have a weight taken off my mind if you can prove to me that I am mistaken. . . . The only fear I have is that you have consulted your pastor and that he has consented to the change.⁷⁰

The fact of the matter was that, as Mother Theodore had suspected, the arrangements were indeed the pastor's and were an outcome of his original negotiations to secure public money. He offered an explanation at once:

I am given for the instruction of my little Irish girls two hundred dollars. The Sisters lose nothing of their independence; they teach everything they taught before. A very polite visit of General Stapp⁷¹ and Mr. Dunn, the bank president, has been called an examination. From time to time the superintendent will come for a visit of civility, when he will admire the good deportment of my little girls and the talent of the Sisters in rearing them so well, without a word and without the right to say one. This is all arranged between us and will be called an inspection. Everything is done to please and oblige you. We leap high over a law, stupid and bad, it is true, but one they can compel us to observe. Everything is done for you and for justice, and you become like *Jupiter Tonnant*. . . . You are more clever than I; you know better than I your duties toward your community. I may be mistaken, and this is often my misfortune, but I do not think that you have more at heart than I the principles of our holy religion. I told the mayor and the others

⁶⁷ Conry, *Saint Michael's Church, Madison, Ind.*, p. 36.

⁶⁸ *J. and L.*, p. 334.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 291, 330.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁷¹ General Milton Stapp, born in Kentucky in 1793, fought in the battle of the Thames and later served in the Indiana Legislature and Senate. In 1850 he was elected mayor of Madison and in 1853 became part owner of the *Madison Daily Banner*. In 1860 he removed to Texas where he died in 1869.

that if they asked the sacrifice of a single one, I would throw their money in their faces, but they said "Be free. Teach what you wish. For the sake of justice we will close our eyes." All they ask is the introduction of the readers. . . . My good Mother, be reasonable. Permit you and yours to be loved. I think we all owe much gratitude to old General Stapp and to Mr. Dunn.⁷²

This introduction of textbooks and inspection by public school authorities were held out to the Catholic schools elsewhere, also, at this time and later, but the rejection of both has been an unchangeable characteristic of the American parochial school system. To many Catholics in the 1840's and 1850's, the public school system did not appear the serious menace to faith it was afterwards recognized to be. It is not surprising therefore that good Father DuPontavice should have shared their error. The Know-Nothing movement, however, was soon to drive home in an irrefutable manner the importance of the parochial school with its own religious training and its own books.

The public schools were, in fact, already proving in Madison earlier than in any other locality in Indiana the unmistakable menace to the Catholic schools which Mother Theodore had feared. As established there, they were looked upon as models for other towns.⁷³ Widespread opposition to the movement rose among the people, however, largely from the resultant increased taxation, and many expected the public school laws to be repealed. In Vigo County during the fall and winter of 1854 the public schools closed from lack of funds.⁷⁴ As early as January, 1852, Mother Theodore had noted, however, a retrogression in the Sisters' school in Madison,⁷⁵ especially in the high school, Saint Anne's Academy, as it was called, attended largely by daughters of Protestant families. The following year the enrollment was seriously affected. In September the Foundress wrote, "Our Sisters have all returned to their missions and reopened their schools. Madison, where we had so many Protestant pupils, is almost wiped out."⁷⁶ The utter lack of religious training at first withheld many from patronizing the public schools, but eventually they attracted the greater number of Protestant pupils.

We are told that next year we shall not have a single Protestant pupil, wrote Mother Theodore to the French superiors in June, 1853. It is certain that the utmost is being done to destroy the Catholic schools. A law has just been passed obliging all the inhabitants of America to send their children to the public schools, called graded schools, which are entirely free and directed by Protestants, to the maintenance of which all must contribute a certain sum whether they have children or not. It has even been proposed to fine those who refuse to patronize these schools.

These public schools have already caused our Protestant classes at Madison to fail, and they even threaten the Catholic classes; but we have offered to teach the latter for nothing rather than let them go to these schools of perdition. We are poor, but the Heavenly Father will feed us. He would not let us die of hunger. Pray for us, dear Mothers and Sisters, and for our poor Catholics so unjustly persecuted.⁷⁷

⁷² A Mother Theodore, 13 décembre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

⁷³ *Wabash Courier*, August 30, 1854.

⁷⁴ *Wabash Courier*, August 16, 1854.

⁷⁵ A Mère Marie, 26 janvier, 1852. S.M.W.A.

⁷⁶ A Mère Marie, 18 septembre, 1852. S.M.W.A.

⁷⁷ Aux Mères de Ruillé, 14 juin, 1853. S.M.W.A.

A little later Mother Theodore added further details:

It seems that hell is let loose this year in America against Catholics in general and particularly against our schools. A law has been passed which compels all the inhabitants of the Union to pay a tax for the support of the Free Schools. This law applies to all the States. The schools are free; that is to say, the pupils pay nothing, and all the children, poor and rich, receive the same education gratuitously. Everything, even Greek and Hebrew, is taught in these schools.

But it is not permitted to speak one word about God, more than what is contained in the textbooks wherein Catholics are horribly calumniated. If the Almighty lets this continue, not only our missions but all the Catholic schools in America are finished. People run to these schools now in a sort of frenzy. Pray to prevent the demon from succeeding. To win over the Catholics, the greatest efforts are being made, and, unfortunately, with much success in several localities.⁷⁸

During these years Father DuPontavice had been making extensive alterations and additions in Saint Michael's old stone church built by Father Michael Shawe, Madison's first pastor, in 1839. The pastor had now removed a part of the hill on which the edifice stood and "constructed in two months a charming addition"⁷⁹ which was approaching completion in June, 1852. In the following year he received a lot gratis and beginning with one hundred dollars of his own, collected in a tour of ten hours among the employees on the railroad the sum of \$658. "I will make that same promenade four times this year," he confided to his constant correspondent in France, Bishop de la Hailandière, "and I shall have paid for and built my church, and finished my preparations for the tower."⁸⁰ His plans met with the unqualified support of Bishop de Saint-Palais. "I submitted my plans to my Bishop," he continued. "He answered, 'Dupo, build where you please, as you please, what you please, and when you please, *carte blanche*.' He will lose nothing,"⁸¹ concluded this resourceful pastor.

North Madison, a suburb founded in 1847 on an eminence some two and a half miles from the city, was now engaging his zeal, and he was building a church and a school there. For the latter he had asked Sisters of Mother Theodore, and she noted in the diary on August 19, 1853, "We have also established a new mission at North Madison, founded by the Reverend H. DuPontavice, benefactor of our congregation." "Father Du Pontavice of Madison, vicar general, lends a house, school, and furniture for two Sisters," is the note in the Minutes of the Particular Council. Mother Theodore delegated Sister Mary Cecilia to accompany and install the two foundresses, Sister Catherine and Sister Louise, as she herself was fully occupied with the opening of Evansville. Father DuPontavice had been disappointed in the house he had expected to secure for the Sisters, and no dwelling was available for them on their arrival. The best he could do was to engage two rooms for them in the residence of one of his parishioners.

I told you, wrote the pastor in December, 1853, that Monseigneur had approved verbally and in writing my project of building a church and a school at North

⁷⁸ A Mère Saint Charles, 25 septembre, 1853. S.M.W.A.

⁷⁹ DuPontavice Collection, 1 juin, 1852.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2 avril, 1853.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Madison. It was a means of giving a Christian education to fifty children who were going either to Protestant schools or into the streets with the little pigs to enjoy the dust or the mud, according to the weather. It was a means of putting a church at the door of fifty persons among whom were members delicate in health, who passed years without coming to church or receiving the sacraments.

See what I have done since March: built a brick church seventy by thirty-five at North Madison. Under the sanctuary but in stone like the entire foundation, is a schoolroom thirty-five by twenty where there are today eighty children under the direction of two Sisters of Providence. Sister Catherine is the superior. Her assistant is Sister Louise, a young Irish girl brought up by Judge Moore at Vincennes. The church is plastered with plaster of Paris with a superb cornice. The altar is very pretty, and I have a picture eight feet high of Saint Patrick, patron of the church, painted by a French artist, which is better than anything I have seen in Indiana. All was done as if by steam. The nineteenth of June I placed the first stone; on July 6 the first brick was laid; on September 5 everything was finished, and September 11 the church was blessed. On September 12 the school opened with forty-seven children and now counts eighty. The cost of it all with the ornaments, the lot, the altar, vases all in silver, mounts to about three thousand two hundred dollars. You who built so much, Father DuPontavice continued to Bishop de la Hailandière, you can judge whether it is cheap.⁸²

Rumors recurred now and then in the diocese that Monseigneur de la Hailandière was returning to Indiana. Father Martin who visited him at Combourg, was authority for the statement, and Father DuPontavice recurs to the matter several different times among his plans for the future: "I have bought the whole mountain, and since you are thinking of returning to your Indiana, I am going to build a house where you may enjoy one of the finest landscapes and the most salubrious air in the United States."⁸³ Though his heart was evidently in Indiana, the Bishop's desire to return to America gradually died away, and he remained quietly in his retirement at Triandin. Later Bishop de Saint-Palais exerted his influence with Napoleon III to procure for him a canonry at Saint Denis, but without success. All did not continue smooth sailing, however, in Father DuPontavice's projects for the spread of Catholicism in Madison. "The citizens of the infidel schools assisted by my *mauvais sujets*"⁸⁴ tried to destroy my two schools. The first year I had two schools with one hundred and fifty children. Today I have three with two hundred and fifty. There is nothing like opposition," he added, "but, oh, how much I suffered."⁸⁵

Mother Theodore had not been able to accompany the foundresses to North Madison in the summer of 1853, as we have seen, but her plan had been to go there as soon as the convent and the school in Evansville were functioning satisfactorily. The Ohio River, however, was actually in September, 1853, what Bishop Bruté had termed it years before, *la Belle Rivière sans eau*, too low for regular navigation. The Foundress therefore found it better to return to Vincennes and travel by steamboat on the Wabash to Terre Haute and thence later to Madison by the railroad. On leaving Evansville, however, she was attacked almost immediately by

⁸² *Ibid.*, 19 décembre, 1853.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Rascals.

⁸⁵ DuPontavice Collection, 19 décembre, 1853.

malaria which prostrated her for ten days of suffering. The character and duration of her illness might have been much more serious had she taken the Ohio River route to Madison, as yellow fever, more cruel and more dangerous if possible even than the dreaded cholera, had caused the death of forty thousand persons in New Orleans during the summer and was being carried by the steamboats to the towns all along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers.

Hardly convalescent, the Foundress, accompanied by Sister Olympiade to care for her, started for North Madison. She had not seen the school founded while she was engaged in the foundation of Evansville. She wished to take cognizance of the Sisters' situation and their needs, especially as Father DuPontavice had not been able to provide for them as he had expected. She found a growing school of forty-seven Catholic pupils in a town eager to have the children instructed in their religion. In the makeshift convent, two rooms in a parishioner's dwelling, the Sisters were happy and busy, looking forward to better accommodations as soon as Father DuPontavice could secure them.

The elementary schools at both Madison and North Madison continued to flourish, and in 1854 Father DuPontavice reported four hundred pupils in the two places. The enrollment of the *école payante*, Saint Anne's Academy, which had been so seriously injured by the public schools, gradually improved also. Mother Theodore loved this school, begun and organized by the late beloved Sister Saint Liguori, and she knew that retaining the Protestant pupils was a powerful means of removing prejudice. "Eminent good will be done in this way," she remarked.⁸⁶ The yearly First Communion gladdened Father DuPontavice's priestly heart. "We have had a beautiful First Communion," he had written to Mother Theodore in 1851. "Your dear Sisters will have an opportunity to tell you about it. Sisters Basilide and Joachim had a larger share than I in that good work. God will reward them; I think He already began to do so last Sunday. As for me, one day like that wipes away the memory of years of fatigue and ingratitude."⁸⁷ The same year Mother Theodore had invited him to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for the reception of Sister Elizabeth, one of the daughters of Saint Michael's. He sent one of his characteristic replies: "What do you wish me to do at her reception? I know nothing of all those beautiful things, and it is difficult to leave. I do not say, however, that I will not go when the time comes. You see, my dear Sister, this is a Norman answer."⁸⁸

The dispensary inaugurated by Bishop Bazin at Vincennes just before his death had not required the services of a special Sister, and Sister Joachim had spent the two following years at Madison. In 1850 when the orphan asylums were opening, Mother Theodore had withdrawn her and placed her at Vincennes. Often on Sunday morning in Madison when the choir failed to appear, Sister Basilide and Sister Joachim would intone the plain chant Mass which all the French Sisters knew so well.

How could the Bishop think I would not regret Sister Joachim's leaving, wrote the pastor to Mother Theodore. Twice since the Sisters left for the retreat I have had

⁸⁶ *J. and L.*, p. 373.

⁸⁷ A Mother Theodore, 25 juillet, 1851. S.M.W.A.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

to say Low Mass on Sunday. . . . You will tell me, "Why not form a choir with your *Irlandais*?" That is a good question, but my people have no taste for music or chant. They sing in general like oysters . . . and further, the zeal of the house of God no more devours them than that of paying their debts. Of more than one hundred and fifty dollars which is due the Sisters I have received for them the sum of \$00.00, and I am not surprised.⁸⁹

The two foundresses of Saint Patrick's remained only one year at North Madison. The next year three Sisters replaced them, Sister Martina as superior, assisted by Sister Saint John and Sister Agatha. Father DuPontavice's further plans for Madison continued to occupy all his thoughts. The next year he wrote to France:

I wish to make of this mountain I have bought for Saint Michael a Mont Saint Michel. I would like to build there a convent for the Sisters and on the other side a house of education for all the Catholic boys of Madison, that all may be reared under the wings of the great archangel. Oh, if I only had twenty thousand dollars I could finish my work in two years. . . . The Catholics and the first American families will build my bell tower, but I would like the bell to come from France and from the diocese of Rennes. . . . If I could obtain a beautiful bell, the nicest in Indiana, I would be happy.⁹⁰

Father DuPontavice now at forty-three was a familiar figure driving about Madison with his "*immortel poney rouge*."⁹¹ Loved and highly respected by Protestants and Catholics alike, his record of twenty-seven years pastorate is one of continued benefactions. "I have missed my vocation," he once said jocosely of himself. "I should have been a Sister of Charity." Like Bishop de Saint-Palais, Father DuPontavice early became very stout. Like the Bishop, too, he had a beautiful voice, and his singing of the hymns to the Blessed Virgin during the May devotions, especially the one beginning "'Tis the Month of our Mother,"⁹² was long a cherished memory among the old residents of Madison who heard him in their youth. His voice poured forth also with exquisite melody in the *Salve Regina*, which he had often sung in the solitary prairies of Illinois on his early missionary journeys. "Offer my respects and compliments to Father DuPontavice. I am always fancying I hear him singing his 'Regina Cœli,' " wrote Mother Theodore after one of her visits to Madison. "When he sings that he is in heaven. What a devotional voice he has!"⁹³ To Mother Mary Cleophas, who heard him as a young Sister years later, nothing could be, she thought, more heavenly than his singing of the old hymn "Jerusalem, My Happy Home," in Saint Michael's Church on Sunday afternoon after Vespers.

He took great interest in his schools, often translating items of value from his French periodicals and *pièces de théâtre* for the pupils to perform, and for the teachers selections from current French literature. "I have read two hundred and forty pages of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre tombe*, and find it admirable like everything which comes from him. I am spending some of my leisure in translating it into English for

⁸⁹ A Mother Theodore, 22 août, 1850. S.M.W.A.

⁹⁰ DuPontavice Collection, 29 mai, 1854.

⁹¹ immortal red pony.

⁹² Sung to the French air *Pèlerinage à Marie* by Lambillotte.

⁹³ *J. and L.*, p. 295.

Sister Celeste.”⁹⁴ Unlike his friend and mentor, Bishop de la Hailandière, he did not wish to become naturalized as an American citizen. “*Je ne suis ni ne serai naturalisé*,” he wrote in 1848. “*Je veux rester citoyen français.*”⁹⁵

Unfortunately the pastor's extensive improvements did not for several years include housing for the North Madison Sisters, who still remained without a suitable dwelling. When they were leaving for the retreat in July, 1855, he was planning to begin their new house at once. He continued all during these years to be enthusiastic about the success of the Sisters: “I consider Saint Mary-of-the-Woods one of the greatest blessings God has given to the diocese,” he wrote, “and I would wish to see your daughters everywhere doing the good they know so well how to accomplish.”⁹⁶ Eventually the energetic pastor provided for the Sisters.

Monseigneur has accepted my last piece of ground for five hundred dollars last August after our ecclesiastical retreat, and I put the sum into a house for the Sisters, all of stone, which I built this season at North Madison. They are occupying it now, and it will cost me above fifteen hundred dollars. I hope to see a boarding school there. They have had a good school for three years, but till this year they were miserably housed. I have succeeded, God be praised, in all I have undertaken thus far. I hope I shall succeed in paying my debts. Then I will say my *Nunc dimittis*.⁹⁷

A year later the pastor gives a further résumé of the status of his schools, girls and small boys under the Sisters' care, large boys taught by a lay schoolmaster. It was for this latter group that he had solicited Sisters from Mother Theodore so earnestly a few years earlier, but for many years the general practice was to have boys over eleven or twelve taught by a layman.

I have two houses of Sisters, he wrote to Bishop de la Hailandière in 1856, one at Madison still conducted by Sister Basilide, the other at North Madison, where I built a pretty church and a fine stone house for the Sisters. Under the sanctuary of the church is a school kept by Sister Saint Jean, Marianne Charlemagne. . . . This school is for boys only. In the house which is twelve feet from the church is a girl's school kept by the superior, Sister Martina, and another Sister. My boys' school at Madison is doing well, but an ordinary man keeps it. With the aid of God I support everything and do everything.⁹⁸

The two houses of Madison and North Madison continued during all these years to command the solicitude of the Foundress. She visited them yearly, as we have seen, and an active correspondence kept her in touch with the needs of the Sisters and pupils.

Her motherly heart for her Sisters shows nowhere more patently than in the affectionate letters overflowing with concern and advice which she wrote so constantly to Sister Basilide. The pain which she had caused by her imprudence during Mother Theodore's absence in Europe had long before been totally forgotten and forgiven. To the immense charity of

⁹⁴ DuPontavice Collection, 29 mars, 1849.

⁹⁵ “I am not naturalized and will not be. I wish to remain a French citizen.” *Ibid.*, 6 juin, 1848.

⁹⁶ A Mother Theodore, 18 juillet, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁹⁷ DuPontavice Collection, La Toussaint, 1855.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 février, 1856.

Mother Theodore all that had happened then was like a drop of morning dew, and she forgave as always like the saint she was, without the slight residue of grudge and dislike which might have clouded a less gifted spirit. As she said at the time, no personal consideration could have any weight with her when she saw their little Congregation on the verge of ruin. Sister Saint Francis Xavier often remarked that Sister Basilide's name occurred in the diary register of Mother Theodore's correspondence oftener than that of any other Sister. She had now been over five years in charge of the two large schools at Madison, but only years later did she finally overcome the faults of character which had once all but wrecked the Community. Though she was endowed with great generosity and intelligence, and with an excellent French physical constitution, prudence and wisdom, as Mother Saint Charles regretfully acknowledged, were not her gifts. Nevertheless her wise superior at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods never ceased to write to her repeatedly kind and affectionate letters filled with home news and details of Community affairs intermingled with counsels and exhortations. "I love my Basilide," she remarked more than once. She never showed more than in her treatment of Sister Basilide how adept she was in the difficult art of eliciting the best from everyone.

COMPLETION OF THE NEW MOTHERHOUSE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMY
KNOW-NOTHINGISM IN INDIANA

"This poor Church of America, so persecuted and yet so flourishing in the shadow of the cross!"

MOTHER THEODORE

ON THE Foundress's return on September 15 from North Madison to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, where many urgent matters were awaiting her attention, she found Monsignor James Oliver Van de Velde, who for four years after the death of Bishop Quarter in 1848 had been the Jesuit Bishop of Chicago. During this period marked by continual episcopal journeys among the scattered Catholic settlements of Illinois, he came twice to Baldwinville to the church of Saint Aloysius at the North Arm where the Reverend George A. Hamilton, vicar general, was in charge. On both these occasions the Bishop, accompanied by his vicar general, came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, "that romantic place," as he called it. At the time of this, his last visit, his failing health had already necessitated his transfer to the episcopal see of Natchez,¹ which he reached in time to journey to New Orleans to assist in the consecration of Bishop Martin to the see of Natchitoches on November 30, 1853. The Bishop had greatly admired the beautiful new academy at his earlier visit, and now he noticed with pleasure the handsome new motherhouse which had risen since his last visit.

Though occupied by the Community since the retreat, the interior of the building was far from complete, and the approach of winter in a large, draughty edifice only partly finished promised many days of suffering. Although the carpenters were working on them, no doors were yet in place, the stairways were without banisters, and owing to the still mounting enrollment at the academy, practically all the furniture from the old convent had been transported there as the new addition was not yet ready for use.

We are living in the new house though it is very cold this winter, not a single apartment being finished except the chapel, wrote the Foundress to Bishop Bouvier. The doors are being made now, but they cannot be placed at once. The stairs are without balustrade, and all the furniture of the house consists of two beds and some tables for writing and ironing. The refectory tables are boards supported by trestles. Everything else of our movables is at the academy. In spite of this penury we are much better off than in our old house. Next year we shall be well fixed if Providence preserves us.²

By Saint Michael's day at the end of September the painting of the front of the house was finished, a clear pale gray harmonizing beautifully

¹ Like so many northerners, the Bishop quickly fell a victim to yellow fever, dying November 13, 1854 (Garraghan, *Jesuits of the Middle U. S.*, vol. 2, p. 137).

² 6 janvier, 1854. S.M.W.A.

with the green shutters, which by that time were all in place. "The house is beautiful," noted the Foundress in the diary, and it must truly have been so, enshrined in a leafy bower of multi-colored autumn foliage, handsome, roomy, of pleasing and graceful proportions, judged by the standards of the time a marvel for the Vigo County woods. The *Terre Haute Journal* pronounced it "one of the best specimens of architecture in the state," and "admirably adapted to the increasing wants of the institution."³ Though an immense improvement on the Thralls house, the convent was, however, a fairly simple structure with an east and west central hall and a central walnut main stairway. Nearby, communicating with the belfry, hung the bell rope, rung by a novice bell ringer many times a day in a full peal to call the Sisters to Community exercises or in staccato taps to the prayer to the Sacred Heart every three hours. The central south entrance gave upon the front garden. On the main floor to the east were Community room and chapel running the full depth of the building. "Mother's room" at the sunny southwest corner was opposite the parlor. Between them was the west entrance looking out across the ravine through the towering forest trees toward the academy.

During some weeks of superb autumn weather, outdoor work was rushed forward. The old buildings, dependencies of the Thralls convent, were moved away, some to the village, others nearer the new convent where one of the old wings was used for a laundry. The French fashion of washing in the brook had now been entirely abandoned, and Père Michel built a large fireplace for the new laundry to simplify the work. The regulation white picket fences to enclose the lawn in front of the new motherhouse were hurried to completion, and a well was dug in the court. All this outdoor labor was over by December when a storm of snow and wind ushered in a winter of terrible cold which was to be doubly felt in the unfinished convent.

Indoors the work progressed very slowly. "My God, mayst Thou be well served here," whispered the Foundress as she walked through the draughty halls to the chapel or sat in one of the few heated rooms attending with chilly fingers to her correspondence. Fires were built in some of the rooms as winter came on, and screens across the doorways kept out some of the icy cold. John Warner, the Terre Haute carpenter, was steadily employed all during the winter, and the painters were working upon the woodwork. The balustrade of the main central staircase in walnut and the mantel pieces were not finished till March. The windows, which were not all in by January, were furnished with "a convenient series of weights which made them easily raised and lowered," a curiosity in America in 1853.

The furnishings were installed as they were purchased; a *beau tapis pour la chapelle* and a "*grande Bibliothèque* costing ninety dollars" were major items of purchase during the late autumn. The assembling of the books of "our library" was completed a few days before Christmas. Not till March 7, however, feast of the Compassion of the Blessed Virgin, was the superior general's room occupied for the first time. The Foundress besought for those who would use the room as her successors the "spirit

³ August 4, 1854. Emeline Fairbanks Library.

of God, the grace to die in His love, and an earnest devotion to the Mother of Sorrows." She herself was deeply devoted to the cult of the dolors of the Blessed Mother of God, a devotion closely linked to the cherished veneration of the Immaculate Heart of Mary so popular among the French priests and Sisters in America. No day passed without the Foundress's retracing lovingly the sorrows of Mary in the "Stabat Mater," and this devotion it was, with its wealth of heavenly graces, which she left as a legacy to her successors in the office of superior general.

Just after Easter the interior painting was finished, and the walnut woodwork of the parlor and main corridor varnished. Spring came very late. On Holy Saturday a heavy snowstorm kept the villagers away from the services which Father Corbe accordingly transferred to the convent chapel. As soon as the weather permitted, however, Jean Delahaye began work on the *parterres* in the garden in front of the motherhouse and planted a number of evergreen trees, balsam pines purchased in Indianapolis. Not till June, 1854, did the carpenters leave, and even then, after two years and a half, their work was not entirely finished. "Old Providence," the historic Thralls house still standing on its original site, shorn of its dependencies and rechristened *Nazareth*, was to be painted and prepared for use as the village school, but the men transferred their labors first to the academy where, despite a summer of debilitating heat, the urgently needed addition in the rear of the main section of the building must be completed if possible before September.

Two days before Christmas, 1853, the familiar lithograph of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, printed afterwards for twenty years at the head of a large double sheet with information concerning the academy sent to the parents of prospective students, was received from New York, and Mother Theodore enclosed one of the pale blue sheets in her New Year's letter to Bishop Bouvier. A water color sketch by Sister Saint Francis Xavier had gone earlier to the superiors at Ruillé.

Like many of the early drawings, these pictures have not the unerring accuracy of the photograph and, to bring them all into focus, minimize considerably the distance commented upon earlier by Bishop Bazin which separated the buildings. To Madame Le Fer de la Motte, Mother Theodore confided the cost of the structure, much greater than she had anticipated, eighty thousand francs,⁴ of which in March, 1854, sixty thousand had already been paid.

During this winter of hardship and privation in the new motherhouse an impending sorrow hung over the Community in the precarious health of their valued friend and protector, Bishop Bouvier. His long life of devoted service to the Church was in fact drawing to a close. His *ad limina* journey to Rome in 1852 had proved a great tax upon his failing strength, and Mother Mary's letter of March, 1853, had told of his serious illness, news which deeply afflicted Mother Theodore. "I cannot shake off a growing uneasiness about our venerated prelate," she wrote a few months later, "for he must be advanced in years. But what a loss for us when God calls him to Himself! He will not leave us, however, but will remain near us to love and protect us."⁵ But before his death he was to give to

⁴ \$16,000.

⁵ Aux Mères de Ruillé, 14 juin, 1853. S.M.W.A.

his American daughters a last token of his interest and affection, his portrait. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had asked for his likeness during Bishop de Saint-Palais's stay in Europe when the Bishop of Le Mans had expressed a wish to send something to the Community in return for the remembrances they had offered him at that time. She had then thought only of a daguerreotype, but on Holy Thursday, April 13, 1854, Mother Theodore received a letter from the Bishop announcing his portrait in oils, his last gift to the Community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

She wrote at once to thank him in the name of all his daughters of the woods and to send directions for expediting the precious canvas across the Atlantic in safety to Madame Parmentier's son-in-law, Edouard Bayer of Brooklyn, who still acted as the Community's agent *gratis pro Deo*. Although the Bishop announced the precious *envoi* in August, in November it was still anxiously awaited at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and was not received till July, 1855, many months after the Bishop's death, having remained through an oversight six months in the New York customhouse. It represents the Bishop in the purple *cappa magna* and ermine cape, one hand with plain episcopal ring and characteristic spatulate finger tips, resting in scholarly fashion upon a volume of his famous *Institutiones Theologicae*, which had made his name known in ecclesiastical circles on two continents. Younger looking than Mother Theodore remembered him, his large blue eyes, fine brow, and serious air express admirably the benevolence and justice of his character. She pronounced it a perfect likeness of the venerable Bishop of Le Mans depicted in his prime. Born in 1783, the Bishop was in his seventieth year when the portrait^o was painted. She would have been glad at this time to have a copy of the portrait of Father Dujarié at Ruillé, but for this the Community waited till 1866 when Sister Mary Joseph made an excellent replica during a visit to France at that time.

Having succeeded admirably in suggesting to Bishop Bouvier the idea of presenting his portrait to the Community, Sister Saint Francis Xavier now embarked upon another and more difficult venture, that of securing a likeness of Mother Theodore. Owing to the Foundress's many occupations Sister Saint Francis Xavier was often charged with part of her correspondence, especially after the death of Sister Angelina, who had acted for years as English secretary to Mother Theodore. Accordingly Sister Saint Francis Xavier writing to Bishop Bouvier in the spring of 1854 during Mother Theodore's absence, had an opportunity to broach for the first time a subject discussed at intervals during all these years:

I must inform you of a ruse which came to my mind. For a long time we have wished Mother Theodore to have her portrait taken in oil,—we would even be satisfied with a daguerreotype—but neither our prayers nor our supplications have availed so far. She was extremely touched at your condescension [in offering his portrait] I am convinced that if you asked for her likeness she would not refuse it, and we, looking upon what belongs to our Father as ours, would have it copied. What do you think of our scheme? Our reverend superior would be much pleased and we still more so. We are happy, indeed, that God leaves us this beloved Mother Theodore. She has been very sick this winter, but we had recourse to our great

^o Still hanging in Providence parlor at Saint Mary's.

remedy, prayer. She is at present visiting our missions, whose number increases every year.⁷

Mother Theodore had already used her authority and her great powers of persuasion to induce Sister Saint Francis Xavier to permit herself to be daguerreotyped for her family in France, and Elvire's likeness was promised to go later after her profession. The country was just emerging from the period during which the only means of perpetuating the features of the beloved or the famous was the oil painting, and photography had not yet taken on the rapid development which characterized the Civil War period. The daguerreotype was not yet in common use, especially for religious. Mother Theodore related in her inimitable way to Madame Le Fer the tact and finesse involved in securing Sister Saint Francis's likeness, the choice of a lovely summer day in 1853, the invitation to the two sisters to accompany her to Terre Haute, the pleasant chat as they drove along upon the weather and "the beauty of our forests," always a favorite topic. At last Mother Theodore proposed the picture.

What a shock! Imagine, if you can, all the objections made by our poor little daughter, and also the eloquence with which we opposed them. We made enough fuss to deafen the horses; however, we had not persuaded her, and we were already on the bridge over the Wabash. Finally we found the vein of persuasion by painting in lively colors the pleasure you would have in contemplating those cherished features and in showing the likeness to everybody. We represented the family assembled at the opening of the package; we heard their cries of joy, the conversation which ensued, etc. At last the tears flowed, and the victory followed.⁸

Mother Theodore's picture was, however, a much more difficult proposition. For a long time she resisted vigorously every effort of her daughters to secure this much desired likeness. Once when they had surreptitiously brought an artist from Terre Haute and he presented himself with an order to permit him to work, she was so pained and disconcerted that he was sent away. The pressure from all sides became, however, so powerful and so continuous that she was in a manner forced to yield. A likeness would be taken in any case after her death, as she well knew. Though it was a question only of a daguerreotype she insisted, superior general as she was, upon receiving first the approval of Mother Mary, so fearful was she of introducing what might be considered worldly practices into the Community. At last on June 8, 1855,⁹ during a visit of Monseigneur de Saint-Palais at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, "for my penance" as she said, "at the cost of ten francs," the daguerreotype was taken¹⁰ from which the oil painting received after her death, which hangs in Providence parlor, was made.

Bishop de Saint-Palais's authority and wishes had counted for much in securing the picture, but since his return from France his own health had given considerable cause for concern. He had grown very stout, a fact which did not, however, in any degree abridge the activity with which he devoted himself to his episcopal duties. Recurring attacks of malaria, which had been severe at Vincennes during the summer of 1853, had

⁷ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 360.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

⁹ Community Diary.

¹⁰ Three daguerreotypes were secured, of which one was eventually sent to France.

greatly reduced his strength. During the following winter he was still very ill. He had come nevertheless to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in November accompanied by Father Benoit, but Mother Theodore was so concerned at his suffering appearance that she sent for Dr. Read. After a two weeks rest under Sister Olympiade's care, however, he was able to return to Vincennes. Mother Theodore accompanied Sister Mary Cecilia at the same time to consult Dr. Baty as Sister's health had been very poor for several months. He found her to be suffering from a serious heart ailment which necessitated complete rest. She remained therefore in Vincennes though her absence was greatly felt at the academy, where there was no one to replace her; and many of her duties, especially the correspondence and accounts, fell to the already overburdened Foundress. She was so busy, as she wrote to France, that she could not even take time to glance over the *Univers*, edited by her old friends, Veuillot and Aubineau with its news of Catholic France.

The Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had been following with the deepest interest the series of controversies during the years from 1850 to 1853, which had caused the *Univers* to be proscribed in several French dioceses. Pope Pius IX, however, took up the defense of Veuillot and his associates, and during the summer of 1853 he wrote a long letter of affectionate reassurance to his friends, Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Francis Xavier:

VERY DEAR SISTERS,

I have received your letter enclosing the life of Sister Seraphine. Mlle. de la Valette had forgotten to send me this treasure. I would have bitterly regretted not having it. . . . We speak of you very often; we congratulate ourselves on having known Mother Theodore and still hope to see her again. We rely also on her prayers to be admitted to see her where she will be more at leisure and in a better life.

My good Sister F. Xavier, my honored, much loved Mother Theodore . . . you know without doubt that our family circle is broken. My dear wife who loved you all so much has gone to rejoin in the bosom of God the poor little infant, or rather the happy infant, whose birth and glorious baptism had been announced to you. She died as she had lived, sweet, humble, and confident with the joy of the predestined . . . leaving me five little daughters, the eldest of whom is seven years old and the youngest not yet seven months.

Certainly, my Sisters, if it pleases God to take someone for you from this cherished flock, I will bless Him; may His holy Will be done. "We must do the holy Will of God." This is the last thing my beloved Mathilde said to me, thus leaving me a heritage more precious than all the gold of the world, and the only thing which can replace her. She was a just and truly Christian soul. She died at the age of twenty-nine without having worn a jewel, without having put her foot into a ballroom, attached to her duties, having no desire but for the happiness of her children and her husband. Although in good health, she expected to die young. She was persuaded that her little Teresa, the godchild of the poor, would draw her to heaven. She concealed her presentiments from me and made her sacrifice in silence. She was ready when the moment came. She prepared herself to receive Extreme Unction, answered the prayers, made her thanksgiving, and died kissing the crucifix, without permitting herself to shed one tear over her life taken away so soon, over her children so young, over her husband whom she cherished. When she had breathed her last sigh, her face appeared as peaceful and calm as that of an angel, and we all felt an immense consolation in our immense sorrow. God has had compassion on

her poor children. My sister has taken upon herself the burden of rearing them. Renouncing everything else, she has embraced my poverty and sorrow, which have been alleviated by her sacrifice. Pray for my sister, for my children, and above all for me, that I may be worthy to perform the great duties which God has imposed upon me between this holy tomb and these innocent cradles. Pray also for Mathilde; but to speak truly, dear Sisters, I ask this less earnestly, persuaded that God has not made her wait long for the eternal recompense of her many virtues, crowned by such great sacrifices.

I had hardly recovered from this terrible stroke when I met with contradictions which have echoed in your forests. By the adorable permission of that Providence which has always visibly assisted our work, I was in Rome at the time they attacked me in Paris. I can tell you, my dear Sisters, they attacked me without charity, without justice, even without reason. The Pope judged it thus. I saw him four times. I had with him two long conversations tête-à-tête. I assisted at his Mass in his private chapel, the only secular present, and had the happiness of receiving Holy Communion from his hands. Finally he took up our defense, and our powerful adversaries, recognizing that they were deceived, have given a beautiful example of obedience to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, which has done much good and has given more honor to them than to us.

Nothing can express, very dear Sisters, the goodness of this Holy Father. He has a smile which goes to the bottom of the soul. I felt as much at my ease near him as near the most tender of fathers. I was kneeling almost touching his armchair more than once while listening to him, forgetting everything else save his goodness. . . . He listened to all I wished to say, blessed my children, my parents, my partners, as I named them, one after the other, my friends. Among them you were not forgotten, for I named interiorly all those in the entire world who assist us by their prayers. During some minutes he rested his hand upon my head. I think I feel it still. I returned, consoled, encouraged, ready for the combat. But you have had good reason to think, my Sisters, that if it had been otherwise, we would not have given the scandal of resistance—we would have submitted with joy, nay with more joy perhaps in submitting than in triumphing. We were all resolved to do it. I began by saying to the Holy Father, in the name of all my associates, that we wished to continue our work only if he thought it useful and in the measure he would permit. Even if Rome, I added, would not think it proper to intervene in an affair in which the authority of a Bishop was exercised against laymen, we would not ask for justice, but would unhesitatingly suppress the journal, purely and simply, without protestation or explanation. We will be always in the same sentiments. Nothing shall make us relinquish them. You can rely upon this. In case some new difficulty should come upon us, do not wait for the news. Reply boldly that your friends are Catholics, that is to say children of obedience. . . .

On returning to Paris, a new and great sorrow awaited me. I found Donoso Cortes, the Spanish ambassador, on his deathbed. He was my little Teresa's godfather. . . . He was a man illustrious for his talents and admirable for his piety. . . . one of my dearest friends. After my brother and my associates in the *Univers*, no one was so near to my heart. Before he fell sick, he was making preparations to enter the Society of Jesus. Pray also for him; we often spoke to him of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and if he had been in Paris when Mother Theodore was here he would have been her most generous benefactor.

Adieu, my very dear Sisters. I leave you still to be occupied with you. I wish to make Sister Seraphine known to your friends in France. In the meantime I will share your letters with M. Aubineau. He will not fail to write you, but I must tell you things that he will not mention. He has been decorated for the courage he displayed during the cholera. He shut himself up in the penitentiary at Tours from which the guards had fled. He stayed three or four days, nursing, consoling, and

burying the unhappy prisoners, and did not leave until he was sick himself. Almighty God has preserved him for us, and Bonaparte has conferred upon him marks of his esteem. He is more grateful to God than to Bonaparte. Since then he has married an excellent woman, who has given him already two beautiful children, a little Marie and a little Joseph. He is now established in Paris and gives all his time to the journal. It is a great consolation for us to work together. I need not tell you the comfort his companionship has been for me in my sorrows. He is a second brother to me. He is ever as brave and as ardent for good works as when Mother Theodore knew him.

Adieu again, very dear Sisters. Pray much for us, for my little daughters, Marie, Agnes, Luce, Gertrude, Magdalene, for my sister Elise, their adopted mother, and for my brother Eugene. Be well persuaded that your kindness will be reciprocated. I send you this . . . letter at once, that you may not suspect me of having forgotten you.

You will not be displeased if I give you some news. I think from a religious standpoint, things are going well in France. The Empress is sincerely pious; the Emperor is good and fulfills his duties ostensibly. Good works are incomparably more at liberty than formerly. There are more Catholics in high positions, and they act more freely. One of the principal Ministers, Marshal St. Arnaud, has just been converted and has made it known publicly. Altars have been erected in the camps, and Mass is said. The processions on Corpus Christi are made everywhere, escorted by the troops and followed by the officials. A great number of our soldiers are in Rome, and they conduct themselves admirably. I can bear testimony to that. If Almighty God permits present conditions to continue, I believe there will be much hope for France. There are continual conversions even among the bourgeoisie. The Catholic colleges are full and more are being built. Yet in spite of all this, evil is very powerful; nevertheless, it can be vanquished. Ah! if God would but have pity on France and her people would be converted. How beautiful and triumphant the Church would appear throughout the world! And how different would be the end of this century from its beginning!

Your very humble and devoted brother,

LOUIS VEUILLOT

Paris, June, '53.¹¹

The Bishop's indisposition continued all during the winter and spring, and every time he came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods he was suffering and almost prostrate. In addition to the obstinate relapses of fever, he had a distressing cough, which seemed to resist every remedy. "Everyone here finds the Bishop greatly changed," wrote the Foundress to Sister Basilide at Madison. "He is still coughing, which makes me quite uneasy. I am begging of God the favor of sparing to us this true, this good Father. Please join us in praying very much for him."¹² His priests also, who were devotedly attached to him, were disquieted at his appearance, so weak, pale, and reduced. "May God keep him for us a long time," was Father DuPontavice's anxious prayer. "The diocese is progressing rapidly under his government. He is gentle, but he is also firm as a rock, and everything good loves him."¹³ Ill as he was, the Bishop's labors and journeys were continual. He was starting for Cincinnati, but came back to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods again for Saint Theodore's day three days after Christmas

¹¹ S.M.W.A.

¹² *J. and L.*, p. 374.

¹³ DuPontavice Collection, 19 décembre, 1853.

"giving us a pleasant surprise," recorded the Foundress.¹⁴ It was gradually borne in upon him, however, during these years that the southern portion of the state required all his time and that he was compelled to neglect the north, which was growing with almost equal rapidity, a condition which led eventually to the division of the diocese of Vincennes in 1857.

The phenomenal development consequent upon continued immigration continued all during these years, and the chief pastor never relaxed his care to provide for even the small scattered groups of Catholics the facilities for a normal practice of their religious duties and the development of a vigorous Catholic life throughout the diocese. In accordance with a custom established many years before for the Catholic Kentuckians by Bishop Flaget, the incoming Catholics continued to settle in groups, if possible near a church. The Germans were also advised to cling together, and this policy speedily became general. The original pioneer churches were now, however, rapidly becoming too small and as soon as possible were replaced by larger and more substantial edifices. A native priesthood was gradually building up under the wise direction of Father Jean Guéguen. "He is still superior of the seminary and professor of theology," wrote Father DuPontavice. "*C'est son affaire*. He is always the same, full of piety and learning. . . . Oh, if we had enough of these little Breton priests like him. . . . One must be intimate with him to know him. There are few priests in the United States to be compared with him."¹⁵

Thus with the seminarians under so efficient a guide and preceptor, the orphans cared for, the schools flourishing, and churches rising everywhere to meet the growing needs, religion showed the indubitable signs of progress. "Your Highland¹⁶ is superb," wrote Father DuPontavice to Bishop de la Hailandière, "and could become even more beautiful if Monseigneur could find a man to teach the large orphan boys to work. Two hundred acres have been added to your original purchase. . . . The orphan girls are at the old seminary [Second and Church Streets] the orphan boys at Saint Gabriel's, which is now called Saint Vincent de Paul, and Highland is the seminary."¹⁷

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was developing also. "Our Community is ever increasing," wrote the Foundress to Bishop Bouvier in the spring of 1854, and she gave the numerical details which proved the constant growth of the American Congregation, which now counted eighty persons, sixty-four including twelve novices wearing the religious habit, and sixteen postulants. The number of children in the schools of the Sisters of Providence was now more than a thousand with eighty-five pupils at the Academy of whom thirty-seven were Catholics.¹⁸ The French motherhouse, too, was prospering during these years. In the letter which announced his portrait, Bishop Bouvier had written:

Your Mother General wrote to me from Ruillé that she had just returned from Brittany, that your large and magnificent house at Rennes is ready, that the chapel

¹⁴ Community Diary.

¹⁵ Du Pontavice Collection, 19 décembre, 1853.

¹⁶ The farm near Vincennes to which Bishop de la Hailandière had expected to retire.

¹⁷ DuPontavice Collection, 26 septembre, 1854.

¹⁸ *J. and L.*, p. 376.

will be blessed on September 17, that there are at present sixty postulants in the novitiate. Thus the great religious family to which you belong goes on prospering more and more. I rejoice and bless God for it.¹⁹

The excellent dispositions and the piety of the Catholic girls at the academy were a source of deep consolation to their teachers. Tears welled from the hearts of the French Sisters at the sight of the ardent faith of their American pupils. When Almeria Drake, Sister Mary Joseph's guitar pupil, wearing the beautiful crown which Elvire herself had made, was receiving baptism from Bishop de Saint-Palais, she was deeply affected, but when she was hoping to have her cry in peace the little organist, Mr. Heitz, pulled her sleeve to inform her that it was time to sing. "I thanked God in my littleness for not having made me as full of talent as my sister, for it is very troublesome to be a *factotum*," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier.²⁰ The long years during which the Sisters of the academy had waited for their zealous labors to blossom and bear fruit were now past, and every year conversions took place.

For their Paschal Communion they had been prepared long before, and prepared themselves more immediately by a retreat which they made during the last days of Holy Week. It is impossible to estimate what a Christian education does for these young people. Brought up among non-Catholics, they are ignorant of everything relating to our holy religion; they hardly know how to kneel down when they come to us. But when they leave, they become little missionaries and do an incalculable amount of good to those around them.

The priest at Lafayette, a considerable town of Indiana, told me lately that the only school he had in his town was kept by two of our pupils, converts of last year, who are now fervent Catholics and show admirable zeal for instructing the little children of his congregation. Two others, converts of the preceding years, have entered the novitiate. One is full of piety and has an excellent disposition but not marked ability [Sister Mary Ursula]; the other has strong feelings though she is a good child [Sister Mary John] and is endowed with a superior mind. Both were a long time at the Academy and are well educated. There are among our young professed and novices able subjects, who are being gradually formed for the important services they will later render to the community. Until now God has made use of *nothing* with which to do His work, but it seems that for the future He wishes to make use of *something*.²¹

Sister Mary Cecilia confided the religious instruction of the pupils, except for one catechism class and a conference on the Gospel every Sunday, to Sister Saint Francis Xavier. The Sisters of Providence were still, with the exception of the Franciscan Sisters at Oldenburg, the only religious order in Indiana devoted to the education of girls, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier, who prepared the pupils for the sacraments, infused into their hearts some sparks of her own burning love and fervor. Mother Theodore was touched almost to tears to see the chapel filled with devout young girls preparing for confession. "Later dispersed in the world," she wrote, "they will do much good, a fact of which the devil is aware and which causes him to spare nothing to injure us."²² The Catholic pupils joined the Community in the days of retreat which preceded the great

¹⁹ 19 août, 1854. S.M.W.A.

²⁰ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 396.

²¹ *J. and L.*, p. 376.

²² Aux Mères de Ruillé, 14 juin, 1853. S.M.W.A.

feasts, and began to return after leaving school to prepare in this manner for momentous events and decisions involving their future lives. On November 21, 1853, Margaret Linton of Terre Haute, who had completed her education at the academy a few years earlier, finished her retreat preparatory to her marriage to Mr. Jose M. Madrigal of Havana.²³ Mother Theodore gave details of the pupils' religious training to Bishop Bouvier:

Our boarding school here at Saint Mary's is well attended. . . . But what most consoles us is the good that is being done here. Not only are there always several receiving instructions for Baptism, but there are many Catholics who are learning to know and serve God. The Catholics of this locality have for the past thirty years seen a priest only once a month, in passing, and some even only once a year. They are Christians, yet for the most part, very ignorant, scarcely knowing what is absolutely indispensable. Their daughters, brought up in our school where there is, I may say, a good spirit, return home like little apostles. They are listened to so much the more willingly because they are so greatly loved. You would be consoled could you see the fervor and piety of these young girls. At the great feasts they prepare themselves for the reception of the sacraments by a retreat which they make with as much regularity as the Sisters do. This year we have over thirty Catholic boarders, which shows you the prosperity of the country.²⁴

The general prosperity in Indiana was evidenced by the rapid increase in the enrollment at the academy. Ten or twelve years earlier there had hardly been ten Catholic families who could afford even six months for their daughters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Now, on the contrary, the number was considerable and was continually on the increase. This growing enrollment had necessitated building an addition to the academy containing badly needed classrooms and sleeping apartments, even before the new motherhouse was completed.

Pupils came from all over Indiana. During a visit to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1854, Mrs. Rose Bailly Howe, Sister Mary Cecilia's sister, had left her little daughter Rose, an intelligent and sensitive child, who was destined to be the first graduate of the institution. A number of girls from New Harmony were enrolled for long periods during these years, among them Anna Owen, a daughter of David Dale Owen, the eminent Indiana geologist, and granddaughter of Robert Owen, the founder of the New Harmony social experiment, and Elizabeth Cooper, Mary and Charlotte Sampson, and other descendants of Owen's original colony. For five years, old Chief John B. Richardville's daughter Mary, a ward of Mr. John Roche, was a pupil enjoying every advantage of the school. The Hetfields and McManomys from Covington were still in school, and another pupil from there, Anna Weldon, afterwards the mother of the well-known artist, Eugene Savage, and for several years Mother Theodore's old friend, Mr. Samuel Byerley's daughters, Josephine and Louise, from South Bend. In 1851, Jeanette Buell²⁵ and her younger sister Almeria, of a distinguished Protestant family of Lawrenceburg, came to school; also Sarah Bolton of Indianapolis, daughter of the Indiana poet, Sarah T. Bolton; and Josephine Reitz from the well-known Catholic pioneer family of Evansville. Lizzie, Mary, and Pauline Aveline from Fort Wayne

²³ Community Diary.

²⁴ *J. and L.*, p. 363.

²⁵ Later Sister Ann Cecilia.

had succeeded their older sister Jane, and Pauline entered the novitiate in 1855.²⁶ Among the numerous group from Logansport was Harriet Tipton, daughter of the pioneer general and Senator John Tipton.²⁷

Our boarding school has never been so flourishing, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier about this time to France. Our Sisters are very zealous for the salvation of their pupils and have the consolation of counting among them some exemplary young girls. I could not wish for anything better than the care our Sisters take for their religious instruction, and between us, I must acknowledge that I am exacting in this regard.²⁸

Ten converts in one year was a consoling record.

The Hoosier maidens continued to add to a solid education the still popular accomplishments. In September, 1854, Sally Bolton was writing from Indianapolis to Mother Theodore to arrange a course including piano and guitar, French and German, rhetoric and astronomy.²⁹ Old letters from the parents and guardians of the pupils still preserved reiterate the conviction of the writers that "our own Saint Mary's is equal in every respect to any other institution of the kind in our land."³⁰ In the scholastic year of 1853-1854 the enrollment passed the hundred mark, counting sizable groups from the best families of every town in Indiana. Okalla Read, Dr. Ezra Read's daughter,³¹ whose accomplishments acquired at Saint Vincent's in Terre Haute had elicited, when she was twelve years of age, the admiration of Richard Beste, was now a student at "The Female Institute of Saint Mary's-of-the-Woods, near Terre Haute, Indiana," as the academy was now called (1854).

Entire families were represented, the elder daughters appearing first, the younger as soon as their age warranted leaving home, and often a flock of cousins came to school in the group. Traveling on the canal or stage coach or "cars," or on all of them successively, as was often necessary, under the care of a father or uncle, they were met at Saint Vincent's in Terre Haute by Logan with the wagon to be driven with two Sisters as chaperones out across the river to "Old Saint Mary's." The Buells were just such a group. Almeria Buell made her first trip to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in a carriage, a three-day journey overland from Cincinnati, which she reached from her home in Lawrenceburg by steamboat on the Ohio. Her sister Jennie and she met at school their four cousins, Almeria, Ruth, Anna, and Priscilla Drake from Indianapolis, and when Almeria Buell returned the second year, fifteen young girls accompanied them, all making the long trip to and from school each year in a party.³²

Most of the names on the school roster were evidently those of old English stock; only nine or ten Irish names appear among them, borne doubtless by Catholics. There were not a few educated free of charge by

²⁶ Community Diary.

²⁷ Born in Tennessee in 1786, he fought at Tippecanoe and was appointed in 1823 Indian agent for the northern Potawatami and Miami tribes, residing at Fort Wayne and later at Logansport. He served as United States Senator from 1831 to 1839 and died in Logansport, April 5, 1839.

²⁸ A ma Sœur Eudoxie, 24 octobre, 1853. S.M.W.A.

²⁹ September 12, 1854. S.M.W.A.

³⁰ S.M.W.A.

³¹ Another daughter, Parke Read, was a pupil of the 1880's.

³² *The Aurora*, vol. 47, October, 1917, p. 286.

generous Mother Theodore. Mothers suddenly widowed and reduced to penury were relieved to the verge of tears to find their children kept on at school until circumstances got better. Of one such family of three the diary simply mentions, "They were with us for five years." The grateful recipients of such generosity made known that no bills were sent during that time, and as circumstances always kept some girls at school for the vacations, no one knew another's financial status.

The vacation was now from mid-July approximately to mid-September, and no general recess was customary at Christmas. The required uniform was confined to the headdress, green *barège*³³ sunbonnets in summer, later changed to pink gingham, carefully made with many small frills, and in winter hoods of brown silk lined with red silk "trimmed with ribband of the color of the lining." Pupils were warned not to bring "handsome bonnets for fine occasions." Half ounce letters now went for three cents prepaid, five cents collect, to any point within three thousand miles.³⁴ Envelopes were coming into general use, and parents were asked to prepay all letters. Richard Beste had remarked in 1852 that the system of cheap postage and prepaying letters by stamps was established in the United States earlier than in England. He further noted that the American stamp bearing Washington's bald head [*sic*] cost three cents. Many people preferred the stamped envelopes issued by the government.

The reputation of the school retained its excellent rating.

We have the reputation even among Protestants of having at Saint Mary's the best academy in the United States, wrote the Foundress to Bishop Bouvier. You will perhaps smile with compassion on reading this. *Eh bien*, my good Father, I believe it is true. . . . In America I have nowhere seen such care for the education of the pupils as is taken at Saint Mary's. I cannot glory in it as I do nothing, absolutely nothing at the academy.

Her encouragement and her unremitting care in examining the pupils were, however, potent factors in the phenomenal success of the school. It had also for many years Sister Mary Cecilia's intelligent guidance and instruction, the scientific and artistic genius of Sister Maurice, and the fine philosophical mind of Sister Saint Urbain, who had been trained by Bishop Bruté at Emmitsburg. Sister Mary Eudoxie replaced Mr. Heitz at the head of the music department, and Sister Mary Joseph was teaching singing and guitar. Some time later she was charged with the Sisters' choir. She had brought with her some of the new and attractive *cantiques* generally sung in France of which Mother Theodore had heard. Elvire played the harp well. She also had a beautiful voice carefully trained by masters in Paris, and she sang as solos at Christmas time in the new chapel, Charles Adolphe Adam's famous romance *Minuit Chrétien*, dear to French hearts the world over, and on other occasions Père Louis Lam-billotte's *Hymne à Sainte Cécile*, his melodious May hymns, his *Cantique en l'honneur de Saint Joseph*, *Remplis d'une sainte allégresse*, and others of his numerous sacred compositions. Jacques Roquet, whose "French voice" singing the *O Salutaris*, had once brought tears of nostalgia to Sister Saint Francis Xavier's eyes, had not been with them for some

³³ A gauze-like fabric of wool.

³⁴ *Wabash Courier*, February 2, 1853.

years, but Père Michel Guthneck had replaced him, and his excellent bass voice formed the background of the village church choir for many years.

Sister Victoire, Sister Mary Joseph, Sister Mary James, and Sister Mary Ambrose united their voices there, and in the convent chapel with the strains of the new seraphine touched with a masterly hand by Sister Mary Eudoxie in the special feast day services and in the Thursday evening Benediction, at which all the pupils were present and which was still to many one of the sweetest of their schoolgirl memories. Sister Mary Eudoxie was familiar with the musical literature of the European continent, sacred as well as secular, and had participated year after year during her residence in Belgium in the elaborate and beautiful church services for which that country has long been noted. During her thirty years at the head of the music department of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods an excellence of standards and a taste and advancement in execution were achieved which surpassed anything yet seen in the Vigo County woods. The reform in Church music and the revival of Gregorian chant associated with the names of Lambillotte in Belgium and Guéranger in France, which later in 1910 eventuated in the *Motu Proprio* of Pope Pius X, were gathering momentum during these years, and *L'Année liturgique*, which had so powerful an influence in harmonizing practice with the Roman liturgy, was issuing from the famous Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes, west of Ruillé-sur-Loir, in the same diocese of Le Mans.

Through Father Corbe the Community kept in close touch with developments in the French Church, and a stricter spirit more in harmony with ancient ideals began to make itself felt in the choir singing especially after Sister Mary Joseph was placed in charge. In France where many of the dioceses were very ancient, extending back even to the Apostolic age and counting many local saints, calendars and practice differed from one region to another. Gradually these were exchanged for the Roman Liturgy owing to the influence of Dom Guéranger's writings. At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods the calendar brought from France was gradually replaced by the calendar of the Universal Church in conformity with the decree of the Baltimore Council of 1852. Saint Theodore's day in this calendar was fixed annually on different dates in November and is now commemorated on November 9. Until the end of Mother Theodore's life at Saint Mary's it was associated, however, with the comparative leisure and the holy joys of the Christmastide.

In view of the development of the Community's activities, the Foundress felt increasingly from the year 1853 the need of a larger particular council. The two assistants, Sister Mary Cecilia and Sister Saint Francis Xavier, were reelected unanimously every three years, but their poor health prevented their assuming any part of the Foundress's heavy duties. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had "only a breath of life," as Mother Theodore often remarked confidentially in her letters to France, and for the past two years Sister Mary Cecilia's ill health had necessitated the Foundress's taking over some of the duties of superior of the academy. She felt keenly the need for an econome²⁵ to supervise the farm and the repairs and upkeep of the buildings and grounds, and an English secretary. The expansion

²⁵ Steward or procuratrix.

and growth of the Community gave rise to a corresponding increase of responsibility and labor.

She had become to a certain extent during these years immune from the alarming attacks of pneumonia which, as Sister Saint Francis Xavier records, had made the Community cry, *Parce Domine*, but continual fever and frequent sharp attacks of the different maladies epidemic in Indiana from time to time caused her great suffering. She was, with the exception of Sister Lawrence, the only member of the Community attacked by cholera, and hardly a year went by without several long and serious illnesses. She was now fifty-five years of age, her health broken by hardships physical and moral.

As to my health, she wrote to the French superiors, I have very little strength. . . . I can hardly walk, yet I must be on foot all day long. Then the care of the temporalities occupies me much, too much. . . . Pray for me, and tell me, do you not think that I ought now to have an econome? I have had to make all the purchases for the construction of this house³⁶ and to attend besides to all the other business, the correspondence, visiting the establishments, and so forth. I feel that it is too much for me. Sometimes I am seized with a longing to escape from it all and go back to Ruillé to claim again my little corner and its peace. But then I consider these thoughts a temptation, and I send them away.³⁷

In September she returns to the same subject in writing to Mother Saint Charles:

As to myself, dear Mother, I can truly tell you that I am so languid, so unable to work that I have thought twenty times during the past two weeks of returning to Ruillé to be placed among your *bonnes femmes*. . . . I fear much that I may lose the fruit of the sufferings I endure. . . . I have to settle accounts with some man, or buy materials, or do something else when the bell calls me to a spiritual exercise or to give a religious instruction to the community. . . . Who is your secretary now? Since I lost my poor Sister Angelina I have none; I disgrace the house, as they say in English, by my correspondence. There ought to be at Saint Mary's a secretary and an econome. I do not do half that should be done.³⁸

Her correspondence was now almost all carried on in English. Only to the older Sisters and to the French clergy could she use her native French. Her need of assistance though increasing gradually to the end of her life, as her health grew steadily worse, met with no immediate recognition from the superiors at Ruillé, and she was destined never to be relieved in this life of any part of her heavy burden. Her desire of laying down her superiorship and returning to Ruillé was not well received in the Community.

Yesterday I scolded her seriously, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier, as I am beginning to be vexed at hearing her projects. Father Corbe was in a bad humor the day before as he cannot support this topic of conversation. He is indeed excellent, this good Father Corbe, and we are fortunate to have him. We greatly fear he may be made a Bishop. He speaks of his departure when Mother Theodore talks of hers as it is his only means of making her change the subject.³⁹

Nor did the self-depreciation, so characteristic of the saints, which led her to minimize the value of her instructions, meet with the approval of

³⁶ The new motherhouse.

³⁷ 14 juin, 1853. S.M.W.A.

³⁸ 25 septembre, 1853. S.M.W.A.

³⁹ A ma Sœur Eudoxie, 24 octobre, 1853. S.M.W.A.

the Community, who gathered eagerly daily at five o'clock for the conference they loved so much. Never was it omitted unless she was away from home or completely incapacitated by illness. To the very end of her life she kept it up when growing weakness cancelled gradually almost every other duty. Sister Mary Ambrose used to recall that blessed five o'clock daily hour. The Sisters marveled to see her coming in from the farm or the new building, recollect herself for a moment, make the Sign of the Cross, and drawing upon her deep stores of spiritual learning and experience, give an excellent instruction upon some point of the religious life.

At other times, her finger holding the place in the little calf-bound volume, *Ecole de Perfection*, or in the French Rule, she entered the Community Room for the half hour she, too, loved. Usually it took the form of an informal instruction on the Rule. As it often centered on the truths of religion also, it went by the name of *Catéchisme*, and as English became as soon as possible the language of the Community, the Sisters even in the early years never knew whether the conference would be given in Mother Theodore's native French or in her characteristic but increasingly correct English. Later all her instructions were given in English. The range of subjects followed the consecrated and beaten path of the spiritual life, but the practice of asking questions and proposing difficulties gave to the little assembly a charming note of informality, which doubly endeared their Mother's counsels to the Sisters. By reason of their absolute clarity and sincerity, their absence of pose and all attempt at professional edification, and the hidden fire of Divine love which they revealed, the Foundress's conferences were deeply valued and were listened to with earnest attention. The Sisters, in fact, openly preferred them even to those of the distinguished preachers who sometimes addressed them.

Little personal touches of familiar affection abound in the faded notes which have been lovingly preserved for over a hundred years, fugitive excerpts for the most part taken on the spot or immediately afterward and copied carefully later on, Sister Mary Ursula's in her round clear hand, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier's in her pointed script. "If you only knew," Mother Theodore once said, "how many nights I pass without sleep in order to examine what will be most advantageous to each of you! How many tears I have shed, how many prayers I have offered to God." Her tender affection, her tireless and resourceful zeal, her initiative and ingenuity, acquired years before with the unruly problem children of Rennes or the less difficult but also less alert little girls of quiet and sleepy Soulaines, had found in the training of her Sisters their true and predestined field.

To the French Sisters accustomed from their childhood to the ordered decorum of religious observance in an ancient Catholic country, the ignorance and indifference of their American pupils in matters of religion had been at first appalling. To Sister Saint Francis Xavier in particular, who at her coming to Saint Mary's had left only a few years before an ideal Christian home where Catholic faith and practice had been the very breath of life of the family, the neglected Americans had seemed ever a source of shocked wonder. Even the earnest young girls who aspired to the religious life and had been received into the novitiate were all products of the

pioneer homes and in great need of instruction in the vital and essential points of Catholic belief. Gradually, however, all this had changed. Mother Theodore's daily conferences and Father Corbe's regular two o'clock Sunday afternoon lectures developed year after year the basic ideas of Catholic theology, dogma, and practice, and the final result appears in Sister Saint Francis Xavier's remark which eventually came to be true, "We receive immense consolation from our pupils."

Now and then in her talks to the Sisters Mother Theodore recommended to their prayers the needs of the Community and the country. The year 1854 was dawning, and the sinister intolerance more or less quiescent since the riots and church burnings of 1844 was crystallizing in the rise of Know-Nothingism, which made of 1854 and 1855 a period more tragic and more memorable in the excesses of Kentucky's Bloody Monday, than any period in the sorry history of religious intolerance in America. The better class of Protestants had been shocked by the mob violence of 1844, but the subsequent lull in the late 1840's had been of only a few years' duration.⁴⁰ The immense number of immigrants increasing yearly to 427,833 in the peak year of 1854, led to a recrudescence of intolerance. The foreign-born in the New England mill towns, where the Irish congregated, and in Cincinnati, Saint Louis, Milwaukee, and other mid-western cities where the Germans settled, gradually equaled and even outnumbered the natives.

The anti-Catholic societies did not, however, take up again the discredited tactics of the Maria Monk era, but embarked upon a regime less violent in character.⁴¹ Proselytism among the uneducated Catholic immigrants in America, the French and Portuguese in New England and the Germans in the midwest, and the poorer classes in Catholic countries abroad, was now undertaken extensively. Lectures, and books and periodicals sown broadcast by pedlars, began to function anew but without the open hatred and violence which had failed before. This time the crusade in America was directed in the main to the large Protestant church-going middle class and was eventually eminently successful. An orgy of anti-Catholic fear and hatred such as the country had never seen was thus gradually awakened and swept from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. Trusteeism, the conflict over reading King James's version of the Bible in the public schools, the Oxford Movement in England and its repercussions in America, Catholic agitation for a share in the school funds, and the militant and uncompromising attitude of some Catholic writers and speakers, all these and other causes combined to rouse a bitter animosity and mob violence unseen for years.⁴² The conversion of the famous editor and publicist Orestes A. Brownson was deeply resented.

The public school movement combined with this new and growing wave of intolerance to injure further the schools of the Sisters of Providence. Protestant pupils everywhere withdrew in considerable numbers. At first the anti-Catholic propaganda was disregarded. When at a Presbyterian fair in Fort Wayne dolls dressed as Sisters but with horrible and grotesque heads were offered for sale, no buyers presented themselves, and Saint

⁴⁰ Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 238.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 314.

Augustine's Academy was only afterwards more flourishing than ever. "We have the consolation of being the objects of the hatred and contempt of these unfortunate brothers," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Bishop Bouvier. "It is a good sign. If we were of the world, the world would love its own."⁴³ Sentiment changed, however, and rapidly. As early as 1851 the old calumny of novices being retained against their will had cropped up. "Pray for us. It has just been published in a Protestant paper that a young person is being detained here against her will," wrote Mother Theodore to France. "After a similar calumny the Ursuline Convent in Charleston [Charlestown, Massachusetts] was burned. May the will of God be done."⁴⁴ A similar attack later in the *Madison Banner* brought Father DuPontavice to the defense of the Community:

I have just written a severe letter to the editor of the *Banner*, he wrote to Bishop de la Hailandière. They accused the Mother and the Sisters of nothing less than keeping by force a postulant whom I had sent there and retaining the money sent by her mother for her return, when the truth is that the child preferred death to coming back to a crazy mother married a second time. . . . From one end of the United States to the other the same tactics are practiced.⁴⁵

Calumnies against Saint Mary-of-the-Woods appeared even in the *Terre Haute* papers. "This is the first time that this has occurred,"⁴⁶ wrote the Foundress sadly.

When Bishop de Saint-Palais had stopped at Saint Mary's on Saint Theodore's day in December, 1853, he was on his way to Cincinnati to pay his respects to the Apostolic Nuncio to Brazil, Archbishop Cajetan Bedini, who had been sent on a special mission to America by Pope Pius IX to settle the vexed question of trusteeism. His Excellency was visiting different American cities, and the Bishop hoped to bring him to Vincennes and perhaps to Saint Mary's. The Nuncio's visit became, however, the occasion for an outbreak of mob violence all over the country in which he narrowly escaped assassination. The period was a time of bitter partisanship. The visit of the Hungarian revolutionist Louis Kossuth, who was interested in separating Hungary from Austria, had aroused a tide of adverse feeling. Though the government brought him here in a warship, his vogue soon died out. "No people on earth are so easy to dupe as the Americans," wrote Father DuPontavice, "but they quickly recover from their infatuation."⁴⁷ An Italian apostate priest and revolutionist, Alexander Gavazzi, touring the country, spoke in Indianapolis against the Catholic Church and Catholic schools on October 29-30, 1853.⁴⁸ Some echoes of his harangues reached the Vigo County woods, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier included them in a letter to her family:

The demon . . . to introduce Catholicism into America uses nuns, real Eves, with their sweet, engaging manners, their knowledge, and their attractions. . . . Guard against sending your children to their schools, and even against placing near them

⁴³ 22 mai, 1852. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁴ A ma Sœur Eudoxie, 20 novembre, 1851. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁵ DuPontavice Collection, 7 octobre, 1854.

⁴⁶ A ma Sœur Eudoxie, 20 février, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁷ DuPontavice Collection, 7 mars, 1852.

⁴⁸ Carl F. Brand, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, vol. 18, 1922, p. 53.

servants reared by the Sisters. . . . The evil is greater than you think, and I know better than you that Catholicism is daily increasing.⁴⁹

Intolerance was now beginning to be open in and about Terre Haute, and in 1853 entire columns of anti-Catholic propaganda appeared in the *Wabash Courier*, growing more bitter during the following year. The issue of January 11 contained an attack on Brownson, the "great hollow top . . . who has danced from church to church."⁵⁰ Following numbers carried details of attacks upon Archbishop Bedini, who was accused of "skinning men alive for conscience sake,"⁵¹ even though he had left the country and was acknowledged to have denied the accusations against him in writing.⁵² Know-Nothings were beginning to appear in Terre Haute in September, 1854, and there was much curiosity concerning them.

Judge Jesse Conard withdrew from the control of the *Wabash Courier* about this time. From then on this paper and the *Terre Haute Express* were very definitely Know-Nothing organs,⁵³ printing consistent anti-Catholic propaganda and detailing at length defamatory reports which were often acknowledged later to be false. Father Lalumiere was accused in the *Courier* of spying in disguise at one of the Terre Haute Know-Nothing meetings, an accusation which he indignantly denied.⁵⁴ In Madison Father DuPontavice was rumored to be threatened with removal from Saint Michael's for becoming an American citizen. Saint Mary-of-the-Woods during this time was mentioned very rarely in the papers. Mother Theodore was greatly alarmed at the growing intolerance in Vigo County and elsewhere, and the minds of the Sisters turned back to the nights of anxiety which had been theirs ten years before.

A new association of evil-doers has just been formed here who are determined to destroy utterly the Catholic religion. They are spread throughout the United States like a siege of grasshoppers. All the towns, the country, even the woods are filled with them. They bind themselves by the most frightful oaths, repeated three times at their initiation, to employ every means possible to destroy Catholicism, and to deprive of employment, even of any kind of labor on the public works, those who are Catholics or even are married to Catholics. Consequently, workmen have been dismissed, individuals have been massacred, churches have been demolished; in brief, they do all the evil they can, and they can do much. God, without doubt, is stronger than they. Pray and get others to pray for the poor Church of America, so persecuted, and at the same time so flourishing in the shadow of the cross.

Last year we had more than a thousand children in our schools. This year we have fewer because of the troubles I have just mentioned, and also because of sickness.⁵⁵

Though the women in general were as active as the men in the anti-Catholic crusade, life flowed quietly along the Wabash for many in these troubled times. The Kansas-Nebraska bill extending slavery to those new territories was very unpopular in Vigo County though its author, Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, was well known in Terre Haute and often spent

⁴⁹ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 314.

⁵⁰ File in Terre Haute Public Library.

⁵¹ January 25, 1854.

⁵² February 15, 1854.

⁵³ Carl F. Brand, "History of the Know Nothings," p. 184.

⁵⁴ *Terre Haute Journal*, September 22, 1854.

⁵⁵ A ma Sœur Marie Anne, 3 novembre, 1854. S.M.W.A.

days at the Prairie House during lulls in his political activities.⁵⁶ The current campaign of bigotry and hatred hardened deplorably the hearts of the Hoosiers. "Miss Dorothea Dix's efforts for the insane have been defeated by a sharp little country lawyer at the court house," remarked the *Wabash Courier*, "and she has gone to England."⁵⁷ Show boats, "floating palaces," as they were advertised, anchored from time to time at the Terre Haute pier and gave performances at two and seven P. M. Ladies with poke bonnets, slim waists, and voluminous skirts eagerly bought the new books by English authors, *Villette* by the author of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, *Lady Bird* by Lady Georgiana Fullerton, *My Novel*, and *Henry Esmond*; also *Moby Dick*, *The Golden Legend* by Longfellow, and *Bleak House* in two volumes. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "a book giving a one-sided view of slavery in the South, written by Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe (assisted perhaps by Henry Ward Beecher) has had a greater run than any other recent publication."⁵⁸

Interest in national events was still acute. People everywhere were contributing to the Washington Monument, though the block of marble sent by Pope Pius IX was stolen by miscreants and thrown into the Potomac River. Hiram Powers's much discussed statue, "The Greek Slave," toured the Midwest and was exhibited in Terre Haute arriving on the cars from Indianapolis and leaving on the canal for Toledo. Spiritism was winning many converts in and about Terre Haute, and balloon ascensions, lectures on phrenology, and character readings for fees were popular. The elite of Terre Haute gathered eagerly for lectures before the Atlantean Literati by local talent on winter evenings at "7-1/2 h., price twenty cents," on "The Formation and Development of the American Character," on "California," on "The Mission of America," and by Newton Booth⁵⁹ on "The Mystery of Truth," and by Dr. Ezra Read on "The History of Epidemics."⁶⁰ Lessons in "Small Sword Exercise, also elocution and oratorical and poetical actions, gestures, and positions" were to be had at moderate cost.⁶¹ Terre Haute was taking on the guise of a city, and horses and pigs were no longer permitted to wander at will on the streets.

It was a strange period with strange political affiliations. Millard Fillmore had an audience with the Pope just before his nomination for the Presidency of the United States on the Know-Nothing ticket.⁶² One of the Know-Nothing leaders in Terre Haute, an author of two anti-Catholic books, was an intimate friend of the Catholic clergy and had delivered a commencement address at Saint Mary's. Another prominent Know-Nothing in Indiana had a niece in the novitiate in 1854, and still others had had their daughters among the pupils at the academy. One-third of the

⁵⁶ Statement of the late Terre Haute attorney, B. V. Marshall.

⁵⁷ October 11, 1854.

⁵⁸ *Wabash Express*, July 14, 1852.

⁵⁹ Uncle of Booth Tarkington, for whom he was named, and son of Beebe Booth, the Terre Haute merchant, father of Elizabeth Booth. Their house was on the site of the Terre Haute *Star* building at Fourth and Ohio Streets, where she was married. Newton Booth went to California and eventually became governor and United States senator.

⁶⁰ *Wabash Courier*, January and February, 1849.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 430.

Senators and eight Representatives in the United States Congress were said to be Know-Nothings⁶³ and even *le vieux Zach*, as the Vincennes people had called the late President Taylor, who was stationed in Indiana during the Tecumseh rebellion, was claimed by the organization as a member.

Father DuPontavice saw in the disturbed conditions of the time only another proof of the Providence of God over His Church.

This [the Bedini affair] and what I am going to say, he wrote to France, are far from proving the downfall or decadence of Catholicism in the United States. In my opinion it is just precisely the contrary. The burning of the Charlestown Convent and the Philadelphia riots are to me a proof of it. All this uproar from the Protestant and infidel clique is a further proof. It is only because they see how Catholics are multiplying, how men aspiring to elevated positions desire to please them. . . . This is so true that our friend, Mr. Thomas, was named United States Attorney for Indiana only at the price of a few lines to Senator Jesse D. Bright in his favor from Monseigneur de Saint-Palais. The Postmaster General Campbell is a Catholic, and several other offices of importance are filled by our people. This has enkindled an infernal envy among the bigots.

They have formed a secret society under the name of Know-Nothings which already covers the entire Union. Their principal object is to check Catholicism by proscribing all foreigners, and their motto is "War to the hilt on Romanism." They have already proved it by burning and destroying churches, killing the Irish, and destroying their property. The present government is Democratic, and they wage a deadly war against it, wishing to destroy the government and the constitution because they both guarantee liberty of conscience. All the old Democratic party defend us. The Abolitionists, the Wigs [Whigs] and ambitious Democrats, all the dregs and scum of the country are leagued against it. There is no longer a Wig ticket at the elections, but only the Democratic ticket and the People's ticket, the latter made up of the *canaille* of the country and especially the Know-Nothings who have for chief the vilest person in the land, Ned Buntline, a man guilty of every crime.

I do not know what will happen, but the outlook is not very encouraging. I do not think Catholicism has ever run a greater danger in the United States than today. But if God wishes to save this country and to make of it the greatest nation on earth, all this will fail, and His Church will shine here more brilliantly than ever. But we will have to suffer. The newspapers are full of stories of priests who fill their churches with arms and ammunition. Everything is being done to ruin us, but if *Deo pro nobis, quis contra nos?* They have invented the same things last July against my church. An attack was even made on my person a few days ago. I expect others towards October 10 at election time. But what is to be done? We are on the battlefield. Happy we, could we die upon it for the One who died for us. *Ibant gaudentes.*⁶⁴

The elections turned out peaceably in Madison contrary to the pastor's expectations:

The *mauvais sujets* tried to provoke our Catholics, but on the preceding Sunday I had warned them, and they behaved nobly. . . . The elections in general have been rather quiet, but the Know-Nothings have won a universal triumph, and if God does not come to our aid, the Know-Nothings or nativists will break the constitution, disfranchise the Catholics, establish the Maine liquor law, etc., etc., and all that in the name of liberty. The steamboat has brought Europe too near America. Euro-

⁶³ *Wabash Courier*, August 30, 1854.

⁶⁴ They went joyfully. DuPontavice Collection, 26 septembre, 1854.

pean radicalism is here, and I greatly fear it will obtain the ascendancy, and we will have times here that the lukewarmness of our Catholics will render very injurious to our Church.⁶⁵

Slavery finally submerging every other political appeal, put an end to the Know-Nothing movement.⁶⁶ Father DuPontavice in retrospect characteristically saw only its benefits to the Church in Indiana, as circumstances elsewhere in the state were much the same as in Madison:

Nothing has ever proved the strength of Catholicism like the Know-Nothing movement. Nothing ever did so much good to our Catholics. The cold have grown warm again, and the tepid have become fervent. All united like one man round their Mother when they saw her attacked. I am of the opinion that public thanksgiving should be offered to these K. N. For my part I have already done it. . . . I had much trouble in the parish for two or three years. . . . Now all is finished. Everything is going admirably. I have never seen so much piety, so much union around their poor pastor as today.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, SS. Pierre et Paul, 1855.

⁶⁶ Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 430.

⁶⁷ DuPontavice Collection, SS. Pierre et Paul, 1855.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COMMUNITY IN 1854

"O Mary, protect thy children of the woods. They owe everything to thee."

MOTHER THEODORE

IF THE year 1854 was a tragic one in many respects for the Church in America, that aspect of its history has faded away long since from memory. Know-Nothingism arose in the dark, and waxed and waned so secretly, so rapidly and completely, that there hardly remain in Indiana documents sufficient in number to trace its spectacular rise and fall. The year marks today just one special event in American Church history, the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and it is the glory of America that no nation worked more zealously to add this new jewel to the crown of the Queen of Heaven. If the Community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods looked to the future, as the New Year dawned, with a return of their old apprehensive sinking of heart, they were on the other hand privileged to inaugurate the year of their heavenly Mother's triumph by a new enterprise in her honor which was destined to accomplish much good.

On Thursday afternoon, February 2, 1854, feast of the Purification, the older Catholic pupils of the academy met after Vespers in Sister Saint Francis Xavier's room at Providence to organize the first Sodality of the Blessed Virgin at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Though the Sodality had been established by the Jesuits at the Roman College in 1563 and thrown open to women some hundred years later, the idea took root in America very slowly and had not taken on in 1854 anything like its later extraordinary development. Of the new group formed that gray winter afternoon at Saint Mary's, Sister Mary Cecilia was to be directress. Its general object was in line with the aims of the *Prima Primaria* in Rome, as the original sodality is still called, the fostering of a true love of God in the members by prayer, religious services, and frequentation of the Sacraments and of true charity towards the neighbor by great zeal for souls.¹ The two degrees of membership were explained at this first meeting by Sister Saint Francis Xavier, and the charter members² signed the record pledging themselves in particular to imitation of their Heavenly Patroness by piety, charity, and "modesty as it should be practiced by a female in every condition of life," avoiding in particular round dances and light reading.³

¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Article "Sodality."

² Charter members of the first or lower degree were Belle McManomy, Lizzie Aveline, Catherine Treanor, Elizabeth Morgan, Mary Bodine, Louise Byerley, Grace Fearn, and Mary Cowl, who were joined before the end of the year by Ellen (Elizabeth) Clark, Kate McCormick (Mother of Kitty Tooev Fleming, '90, and Clare Tooev Kirby, '95; grandmother of Josephine Tooev Williams and Elizabeth Tooev Rittenour: great-grandmother of Patricia Hubbard Miller), and Rose Howe (niece of Mother Mary Cecilia and sister of Frances Howe); of the second degree, Mary C. McManomy, M. F. E. Fearn, Mary Hinde, Pauline Aveline, Pauline (Bridget) McAndrew, Mary C. Rappelye, Catherine McGuire, Mary Gaffney, and Jane Quigley (Sister Saint Helena Egan's mother).

³ MS. Sodality Record. S.M.W.A.

Members were to be admitted after a probation of one month, and meetings consisting of an instruction in the Community chapel or in the church on the virtues proper to a Child of Mary, followed by the Litany of Loretto and the Rosary, and closing with a hymn to the Blessed Virgin, were to be held on the first Saturday of the month. The practices of the sodality were linked at once with the character-forming self-discipline of school rules, and from the first meeting testimonials of edifying conduct consisting of a small card with the legend *Ecce Mater Tua* in illuminated letters were conferred on the members who presented themselves.⁴

The patronal feast after 1854 became December 8, but the feast of the Presentation that year was memorable. Madame Charles Le Fer de la Motte, Sister Saint Francis Xavier's sister-in-law, had sent to the sodality from France a gift of four silver candlesticks, and as there was no space available in the overcrowded academy for an oratory, the sodalists salvaged a store room for their meeting, hung the walls with sheets and erected a temporary altar decorated with the silver candlesticks and artificial flowers. At five o'clock they visited Mother Theodore in a body and listened to one of her beautiful impromptu conferences on devotion to the Blessed Virgin, a subject upon which she always spoke so eloquently. She need only draw from her own experience countless instances of the mercy and love of the Queen of Heaven to kindle undying devotion to her in the hearts of these eager listeners. The first officers were now chosen and their names announced in the evening in the chapel, a secretary, a chorister, and two oratorians. The first officers were Mary Hinde, secretary; Lizzie Aveline, chorister; Pauline Aveline and Catherine McGuire, oratorians. The last named at once assumed their duties and prepared the meeting place where on the next first Saturday the new members were received and pronounced their public act of consecration. The chorister's charge was to prepare and, if necessary, rehearse the hymns.

The meetings gradually advanced in interest and in appeal. At the last reunion of the scholastic year of 1854-1855 held at Providence in Sister Saint Francis Xavier's room two members had received testimonials at every monthly meeting and were awarded each a copy of *The Lily of Israel*.⁵ To the other members pictures of the Blessed Virgin were given by Sister Saint Francis Xavier with the charming and appropriate words of encouragement which were so characteristic of her, urging them to take on as a special vacation practice the teaching of catechism in their parishes.

Additional practices were added as the sodality increased in membership and prestige. Members now wore the Miraculous Medal at all times and maintained contact with absent sodalists by circular letters of intentions and spiritual counsel. The second year a trunk room was fitted up as an oratory and adorned with a large picture of Our Lady of La Salette received from France by Sister Saint Francis Xavier. All the Catholic girls were present at the first open meeting and several Sisters from Providence, among them one of the Sodality charter members, Eliza Fearn, now a postulant, Sister Mary Ursula. During an interval in the program the

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ A popular life of the Blessed Virgin from the French of Abbé Gerbet, which ran through a number of editions in America.

Sisters present agreeably surprised the members by singing a beautiful hymn to the Blessed Virgin.

The encouragement and impetus to a life of true devotion offered by the Sodality bore solid and permanent fruit in the lives of the members. Sister Saint Francis Xavier's words, "We receive immense consolation from our Catholic pupils," became more evident from day to day. The sterling virtue and fervent piety of the sodalists reacted favorably upon all the students, raising the general morale of the school by exemplifying in daily life the honor and power of piety and goodness. This religious fervor and earnestness bore striking results also in the large number of conversions and of vocations to the religious life among the pupils. Fifteen entered the novitiate from the academy during these years.

Another cold winter was now in progress. Science has demonstrated that the winters have moderated in the United States since the pioneer years⁶ when not only the French Sisters but also the Irishwomen accustomed to the mild and equable temperatures⁷ of their native island suffered severely from the biting cold. The year 1854 had the usual low temperatures. Some of the animals died from the cold, among them Tail-lard, the dog who had saved the Community from fire in 1845 by his barking. "Barry, our old ox, weighing eight hundred pounds and very fat," a faithful servant for many years, also succumbed, though his skin when sold brought to the Community the not to be despised sum of two dollars. Later in the year, however, two little deer were born at the barn and called Mignon and Finette, favorite names in the Community, which were passed along in dynastic fashion from one animal to another. The severe winter and cold and rainy spring were followed by a summer of devastating heat. From mid-January the Foundress had been ill and suffering, and was for five days on the brink of the grave, as she later recorded.⁸ Dr. Read was sent for, but prayer had already cured her though her recovery was very gradual. Later during the smallpox scare in Terre Haute she herself vaccinated those pupils who needed it. At the end of the month the first Forty Hours devotion was held in the new motherhouse.

By Low Sunday, however, she was able to start upon her yearly tour of the missions, where she noted "surprising progress" in the Sisters' schools in Madison, Fort Wayne, Terre Haute, Evansville, Jasper, everywhere in fact, except at Vincennes where the "Creole School," Saint Mary's, though its scholastic standing remained satisfactory, had dwindled greatly in numbers since its amalgamation with the orphan asylum. The orphans were doing well, the girls learning sewing and household arts in addition to their tuition in the elementary and grammar school subjects. The Foundress was back at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on June 3 to find the crops seriously imperiled by the late and stormy spring.

Food prices were mounting everywhere, and an almost entirely rainless summer complicated the economic distress throughout the country. Plants and flowers in the Community garden wilted and died in a summer unequaled in Indiana in eighty years for heat and aridity. The carpenters employed in erecting the new addition to the academy had to stop work

⁶ *Newsweek*, June 10, 1946, p. 60.

⁷ Approximately 35 degrees Fahrenheit in winter to 75 in summer.

⁸ Community Diary.

during the torrid midday hours when the thermometer stood at one hundred and twenty-eight degrees. It registered one hundred in the shade almost all summer. "We are parched, baked, burned," averred the *Wabash Courier*.⁹ The prairies and the cornfields were dried up and scorched, and many trees were dying. The forest mast, undiminished in quantity, helped to feed the stock, for the corn crop, so important for man and beast in the 1850's, was a total failure. The price soared to sixty dollars for a hundred bushels of this ordinarily cheap commodity, and Mother Theodore wrote to France that the price of a bushel of potatoes was ten francs.¹⁰ Wood also, so easy to procure from the omnipresent forest, was recorded in the diary as \$1.50 a cord.

The farm could now no longer suffice even in a prosperous year for the needs of the growing Community and academy. The high prices were therefore keenly felt. Later in the year provisions became "dear as gold," and the stock had to be killed, as food for them was impossible to procure. The pigs, however, continued to fatten on the acorns and beechnuts in the woods.

We have a sort of famine in the United States, wrote the Foundress to Bishop Bouvier toward the end of 1854. All provisions are expensive as gold. Potatoes are sold at an exorbitant price at New Orleans; everything else is dear in proportion. The wheat and potatoes failed entirely this year on account of the drought and the excessive heat we have had to suffer this summer which is also considered the cause of the terrible maladies which under different names have decimated the United States.¹¹

A financial stringency gripped the nation brought on by the discovery of gold and the rising living standard, a result of the development of the railroads and the clipper ships, and of inventions like the reaper and the sewing machine, by which prices rose more rapidly than wages. The price of flour gradually mounted to an almost prohibitive figure. Similar conditions prevailed in France, and in April, 1854, Mother Mary had written to ask that some Indiana flour be sent to Ruillé. When Mother Theodore read the letter to the postulants, they gaily insisted that all the white flour be saved for France and that they themselves and the Community live upon corn bread, though conditions would hardly require such drastic measures. A run on the Indiana banks began in November, and by the end of 1854 all the banks in Indiana had broken except the State Bank. Counterfeit money was circulating in Terre Haute, and after several summonses to court Mother Theodore learned to be exceedingly careful in accepting paper money.

The foreign immigrant was held responsible for these conditions by crowding out American workmen and thus debasing the wage level.¹² Although this was asserted untruly, as the foreign laborers took perforce the lowest and worst paid work, it was a favorite argument in the current anti-Catholic campaign of the Know-Nothings. The Catholic people in the Indiana towns where the Sisters of Providence had schools suffered severely. The excesses of the Know-Nothings and the economic distress

⁹ August 9, 1854.

¹⁰ Two dollars.

¹¹ 2 novembre, 1854. S.M.W.A.

¹² Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 334.

were driving many to leave the state. Some families from Vigo County only crossed the Wabash to the fertile prairies of Illinois.¹³ Others joined the emigrant trains traversing Indiana daily en route to the North and West, where liberal offers attracted prospective homesteaders. One hundred and sixty acres free were granted to settlers in Kansas, Nebraska, and Utah. Fifty thousand persons in a stream of wagons crossed Illinois between September and December, 1854, pushing on to Iowa,¹⁴ where the soil was rumored to be "black to China." Father DuPontavice described conditions in Madison in his September letter to France:

We have been afflicted this year with a drought beyond anything ever seen here. In the north of Indiana and Kentucky all the corn has been burnt. In some districts the potatoes roasted in the ground. Flour is sold in New York at \$12.50 a barrel, here at \$8.50. The scarcity of money is terrible, and as everything is dear, there is great suffering. My poor Catholics suffer more than anyone because they are more indigent and because they are Catholics. Others receive assistance from the county and the city. My people are only insulted and mistreated. The result is that three-fourths of them have been forced to leave. Those who can go to the far West or return to Ireland. For myself I am not a little disappointed in all my grand hopes for Madison. The cities of the East are going to experience in part the same thing, and those Catholic people who can will go to Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, and still farther to try to find the liberty they hardly enjoy where they are.¹⁵

This food situation was felt by no one probably more acutely than by Bishop de Saint-Palais with his two growing orphan asylums and his seminary to support. The Christmas collections, which were always devoted to the orphans, were, however, in 1854 more generous than ever.

There is great suffering on account of the food scarcity and hard times, wrote Father DuPontavice early in 1856, but Providence is so good. It helps those who have confidence in it and aids our good Bishop. Money is scarce here, yet the collection for the orphans will be almost doubled. Vincennes alone gave more than eight hundred dollars for these poor children. How well they preach in favor of charity by their appearance alone. I am one of the principal causes of these asylums, and I thank God for it. I have heard them sing the praises of the good God in French. They are happy, and they console greatly our estimable Bishop for you know his nature is goodness.¹⁶

Perhaps this excessive financial burden influenced the Bishop to some extent in desiring to divide his diocese as his pecuniary embarrassment increased during the next year, and the amount realized from the Christmas collections fell off considerably. "His two orphan asylums and the seminary have cost him enormously last year," reported Father DuPontavice in February, 1856.¹⁷ He had noted six months earlier the decision of the Provincial Council, held the fifth Sunday after Easter at Cincinnati, to divide the Vincennes diocese. "Each diocese has a population of between forty and fifty thousand Catholics," he added, probably overestimating the numbers. The ecclesiastical seminary for the province was henceforth to be located at Cincinnati and the preparatory seminary at Saint Thomas, Kentucky.

¹³ *Wabash Courier*, June 2, 1854.

¹⁴ *Wabash Courier*, February 15, 1854.

¹⁵ DuPontavice Collection, 26 septembre, 1854.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 février, 1855.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18 février, 1856.

Despite the continued agitation against Catholic schools, the public examination and *distribution des prix* of 1854 at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were acknowledged to be a brilliant success. To the continuance of the public examinations, however, objections had begun to come from an unexpected source. Two years earlier when invited to preside by Mother Theodore, Father Chassé, college and seminary professor though he was, had excused himself. "Several of those sciences I have never studied; in many others I am so rusty that except in case of an almost absolute necessity, I would conjure you to excuse me."¹⁸ A week later, however, this unfailing friend was agreeing to conduct the examination and also to speak "if you and *notre bon Père* [Corbe] wish it."¹⁹ Announced in advance in the *Terre Haute Courier*, the commencement exercises on Tuesday, August 1, were fully reported later in the same newspaper.

Followed by a long list of premiums, Dr. Ezra Read's address on education characterized by his usual "chaste, classic, and refined style," appeared *in toto*. "The highest and holiest aim of human life," said the speaker, "is to educate the mind and refine the heart. The one controls the world and the vast machinery of empires and kingdoms; it gathers up the little currents of the gentle breezes and converts them to our good; it rides the tempest in safety and holds powerless the hurricane on its sweeping way."²⁰ Dr. Read was a classical scholar second to none, probably, in Indiana in his day, his constant companion a pocket copy of Homer's *Iliad*.²¹ Richard Beste gives a pen sketch of this skillful, patriotic, kindly American physician and his devoted care of the English family stranded for many weeks by illness and death at the Prairie House:

... a middle-aged, light-haired man of about forty years of age; with hollow cheeks and high American cheekbones; with long, lanky brown hair that nearly hid his baldness; with a round, bright blue eye which he opened very wide and rolled about incessantly with an inquisitive, intelligent, good humored, and very animated look. . . . He had been asked to run for Congress but declined, as the eight dollars per day would not compensate his giving up a lucrative profession which he loved. . . . How he labored to impress upon me the beauty of the Constitution of the United States and the truth of his own democratic principles! Then he was a classical scholar and a well-read man. English and French authors were familiar to him. He had never traveled in Europe but he had been in most parts of the United States and had been long in Texas.²²

Dr. Read inserted in his discourse the remark that his professional connection of some years with the institution at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had convinced him that its location in point of health was equaled by few in the county, surpassed by none. This assertion was doubly telling in the sickly Indiana of 1854, of which Mother Theodore had written that there was more illness, cholera, and fevers, than in any year since she had been

¹⁸ A Mother Theodore, 11 juillet, 1852. S.M.W.A.

¹⁹ 18 juillet, 1852. S.M.W.A.

²⁰ *Wabash Courier*, August 6, 1854.

²¹ Born in Ohio and a graduate of the University of Athens and of Ohio Medical College, he was surgeon general of the Texas forces under General Sam Houston. He came to Terre Haute in 1843, served in the Civil War and died, 1877, aged sixty-seven.

²² Beste, *The Wabash*, vol. 2, pp. 11, 124.

in America.²³ Father Sorin at Notre Dame du Lac lost twenty-one persons, priests, Brothers, and Sisters, a crushing blow to his rising institution. Prayers and sacrifices rose to heaven at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for the afflicted Congregation of Holy Cross. "Oh, may your holy Angel in offering you this bitter chalice whisper to you also words of consolation," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Father Sorin, "or rather, may Jesus Himself present this chalice. . . . and may Mary, your tender Mother, console you for the loss of your children."²⁴ Dr. Read's encomium upon the salubrity of the air of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods continued to be verified during this extremely hot and dry summer. The drought continued unabated, and vegetation and animals continued to suffer and die. A flock of sixteen hundred forlorn sheep passed along the National Road in August, "their noses to the ground in a thick cloud of dust."²⁵

Mother Theodore was the only one at Saint Mary's attacked by the prevalent maladies, and though she rallied slowly, all were well and able to enter upon what was to prove an epoch-making retreat. Heretofore with the exception of the first retreat master, Father Di Maria in 1849, a Neapolitan by birth, all the Jesuits who had given the Exercises of Saint Ignatius at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had been drawn from the numerous excellent and zealous Belgians and Hollanders among the western Jesuits. This year the Community was to have a Frenchman, one who "of all the pioneer midwestern Jesuits [was] the most successful, it would seem, in conducting retreats for religious communities,"²⁶ Father John L. Gleizal, whose name has since remained one to conjure with in the history of the Congregation of Providence in America. Born in Avignon, he was already a priest when he came to America in 1837 and entered the Jesuit novitiate at Florissant. He first distinguished himself as a successful pastor and missionary, but in 1854 when he came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods he had been for four years master of novices at Florissant. He was a typical Frenchman, vivacious and affable in manner, gentle and discreet, an effective preacher, and in very deed, as the Community quickly discovered, the "holy priest" described by Archbishop Kenrick at his funeral in the College Church at Saint Louis in 1859.

Although this fact had been pointed out by the papal brief of approbation, the early Jesuits in America seem not to have been fully aware of the valuable instrument for the salvation and sanctification of souls which they possessed in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius and to have confined its advantages to their own use and that of a chosen few.²⁷ After the publication in 1838 of a new Latin translation of the Exercises by the General, Father Roothaan, and a vigorous campaign to establish them in the esteem and in the spiritual activities of the order, the Jesuits began offering them to the religious and priests of the Middle West in retreats and to the laity in missions. Father Francis Xavier di Maria seems to have been a pioneer in the field by his retreats to the Chicago clergy in 1847 and to the Sisters of Providence at Saint Mary's in 1849.

²³ A Sœur Marie-Anne, 3 septembre, 1854. S.M.W.A.

²⁴ 10 octobre, 1854. N.D.U.A.

²⁵ *Wabash Courier*, August 9, 1854.

²⁶ Garraghan, *Jesuits of the Middle U. S.*, vol. 2, p. 144.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

By grounding the Jesuit novices in this powerful means of spiritual advancement and training them to be future directors of retreats, Father Gleizal as master of novices at Florissant was very influential in developing the ministry of the Exercises. He attributed the fervor of his novices to the influence of the Exercises which he had made a "paramount object of study" among them.

This saintly priest's years of experience in different fields of spiritual activity in America had doubled the effectiveness of his work. He was thoroughly conversant with the spirit of America and the character of American youth. "In this country," he remarked, "everything moves with giant steps and even with the rapidity of a steam engine."²⁸ The Jesuit novices in the United States he found to be "endowed with a fund of stability which you rarely find in our youth in Europe,"²⁹ and he pointed out to Mother Theodore the characteristics of the "demoiselle américaine," reserved and independent in contrast with the French character often too expansive.³⁰ It was at once very evident that this wise, experienced, holy, and zealous Jesuit, bound also to the foundresses of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods by the ties of nationality stronger nowhere than among the French, was in a position to render service of lasting character. That he did so to the end of his life in generous measure is evinced by his letters still preserved, especially in those written after the death of Mother Theodore, in which he gave constructive counsels and a reasoned training to the young and untried mistress of novices.³¹

Father Gleizal arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on August 4, ready and able to devote the full time to the retreat. All the Sisters had preceded him, the Evansville and Vincennes Sisters coming by the canal the day before. Monseigneur did not arrive, however, till the seventh, and therefore the exercises opened that evening at five thirty P. M., in the chapel of the new motherhouse now completed and furnished. The Father spoke easily and without difficulty though he had already at forty-six years begun to find it hard to preach in the large churches of the Society because of the chest ailment which eventually carried him off. The retreat masters of successive years are usually referred to in the diary anonymously as *ce bon Père Jésuite*, but this year it is "Père Gleizal, a man of deep spirituality and knowledge of the interior life."³² The Sisters listened with profound attention to his impressive words, and in a tradition of fervent and earnest retreats, this one proved exceptional.

The retreat master took cognizance of every phase of the Community's activities and was accorded at once the confidence due to a friend, counselor, and father. He visited the infirmary and encouraged and consoled young Sister Josephine, still able to be up and about, though destined before another retreat to be laid beneath one of the white crosses in the convent cemetery. His generous words of approbation of the Community and all its works were gratefully and humbly received.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 554.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 649.

³⁰ 24 mars, 1855. S.M.W.A.

³¹ Sister Mary Joseph.

³² Community Diary.

The retreat has given to this good Father the highest opinion of our Congregation, wrote the Foundress to Bishop Bouvier. He found us having an excellent spirit at Saint Mary's. He said so publicly. He was above all edified by our union. He thinks there is not another Community in the United States where the members love one another as they do at Saint Mary's. The fact is that there does exist among our Sisters great charity and a beautiful spirit of obedience, added the Foundress. They are also very devoted and each one performs the duties of her employment with admirable zeal.³³

She singled out for special commendation the Sisters engaged in the laborious tasks of the household, some of whom were pillars of the Community.

They have an excellent spirit, pious, gay, hardworking, and so obedient as to edify us greatly. When we wish to obtain a special favor, we have our Sisters of the laundry to ask for it, and it is granted. All the good that is done here, she modestly concluded, is due to the wisdom of the Rule . . . which would make saints of us if it were faithfully observed.

Father Gleizal had made no mistake in placing his finger upon the cardinal characteristic of the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, the all-embracing charity which bound them together as one. It was the heavenly fruit of the bitter crosses which had weighed night and day upon the Community for seven long years. The crowning virtue of their Mother, it was inculcated by wise counsels in her letters and her instructions and practiced perfectly by her from day to day in full view of her Sisters. Mother Mary Cecilia bears testimony to this fact in her manuscript life of the Foundress, and Sister Mary Joseph did not hesitate to say "Our Mother would die for us." Before they left for the missions she gathered her Sisters in the Community room for her last loving counsels and admonitions, unaware that in the sacristy of the chapel next door Father Gleizal was quietly saying his Office. It was then that he felt he had heard another Saint Teresa, and later in relating the occurrence he gave an evidence of his own humility, "I felt very little indeed, I assure you, in appearing before those Sisters to speak to them when they had such a Mother to instruct them."³⁴

He remained to assist with the ceremonies of the feast of the Assumption³⁵ and in the elections held next day when the two assistants were again re-elected and Sister Anastasie was admitted to the Particular Council and pronounced her promise of fidelity. He left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods the same evening.

I should like to send you good Father Gleizal himself, for he is a living unction to sweeten the cross, wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to her sister Cecile's husband then sinking into an early grave. He is often ill, but, inasmuch as he has surmounted his own weakness, he is full of compassion for others. In features he resembles my beloved father; perhaps it is on this account that what he says affects me so much.³⁶

³³ 25 novembre, 1854. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ *Life and Lifework of Mother Theodore Guérin*, p. 449.

³⁵ Seven postulants were received: Sister Seraphine (Jennings), Sister Bruno, Sister Saint Edward, Sister Saint Antoine, Sister Norbert, Sister Joanna, and Sister Juliana; and five novices were professed: Sister Mary Ambrose, Sister Mary Angele, Sister Isidore, Sister Saint Charles, and Sister Patrick.

³⁶ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 369.

Before returning to the novitiate at Florissant, he made a visit to Chicago where he arranged to insert the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods prospectus in the *Western Tablet*. The Community had been affiliated earlier to the Apostleship of Prayer, founded in 1844 in France,³⁷ now Father Gleizal established the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart in the Community and was sending to the novitiate a young girl of seventeen years, Mary Elizabeth Graves, one of his converts, whose grandfather had disowned and disinherited her. She arrived in October accompanied by Father Chassé, who was returning from making his retreat with the Jesuits in Saint Louis. Mary Graves never faltered in her courageous resolve to give up family ties and wealth to consecrate her life to God. As Sister Gonzague, she had a long teaching career marked especially by zealous and successful work with converts and died at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods March 15, 1921, after sixty-seven years of religious life.

A charming picture of Saint Mary's as it was in the summer of 1854 has come down to us from Father DuPontavice, who arrived on August 16 interested in securing a colony of Sisters for Father Alphonse Munschina, the Alsatian pastor of Lanesville, Indiana, who had come to Vincennes in Father Martin's clerical contingent of October, 1839. Father DuPontavice spent two days with Monseigneur, who had been at Saint Mary's as usual during the entire time of the retreat, and with Father Corbe.

I received your last a month ago after my return from a visit to Vincennes and Sainte Marie-des-Bois which lasted ten days, wrote the pastor of Madison to his correspondent at Triandin in France. You it was who founded this establishment at the price of many sacrifices. . . . I saw for the first time the motherhouse which was completed last year. I saw almost all the Sisters reunited after the retreat. There were more than a hundred.³⁸ About ten were daughters whom I had directed there and who are all very good. It was a great feast to see me there, and it was an equally great celebration for me to see the place where fifteen years ago I arrived a poor missionary traveling towards my first charge.³⁹ Here where I found then only a poor Hoosier cabin is now one of the most beautiful places in the West. One evening I was alone standing a few hundred steps from the chapel whence poured forth some of the most beautiful music I have ever heard. The sounds were almost dying when they reached me. I saw the academy, that superb building. . . . I compared 1854 and 1839. What I felt cannot be told. Those voices so beautiful and above all, so pure, mounting to heaven recalled to me nights of tempest on the ocean or the days and nights of my travels in the Illinois over the prairies and through the woods where the beloved names of our holy religion had never been blessed. There on my red pony with all my heart I sang the *Salve Regina*. [I recalled] also our journey from Bourbonnais' Grove to Danville when

³⁷ Record of Customs, Privileges, etc. S.M.W.A.

³⁸ Mother Theodore gives the number of members in the Community at eighty-eight in November, 1854. A Mgr. Bouvier, 25 novembre, 1854. S.M.W.A.

³⁹ After his ordination on November 30, 1839, Father DuPontavice spent six months at the North Arm for the purpose of learning English, as has been noted. At that time on his journey north he stopped at Joseph Thralls's "Hoosier cabin," and probably said Mass in the frame church which was destroyed by fire in the following February. The records of Saint Aloysius Church at the North Arm have been lost, but Father DuPontavice's signature appears in the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods village church records on January 26, 1840, when he baptized James William Mulvaney, son of William Mulvaney and Mary Bodine. In 1840 he was in charge of the mission at Mount Juliet, later Joliet, Illinois.

we sang in those solitary prairies the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. Do you remember, Monseigneur? The pony is still living . . . at twenty-seven years.

I stayed there two days with Monseigneur and Mr. Corbe and went down to Vincennes with the Bishop. There the remembrances were still more numerous. I saw your portrait in the salon with those of your predecessor and your successors. . . . I ate at the same table and in the same place. . . . The appearance of the place has greatly changed. . . . The poor *bonnes filles*, Jeannette and the others, were happy to see me. . . . The Germans have a superb church, a good congregation, and a good priest.⁴⁰ . . . Why tell you all this? You know it all,⁴¹ but I have allowed myself to be carried away by my remembrances.⁴²

After the missionary Sisters left, Mother Theodore was detained at Saint Mary's by the retreat held for those who had remained at Vincennes to care for the orphans and probably also by a forest fire which for a few anxious hours seriously threatened the new motherhouse. The unprecedented heat and drought of this torrid summer contributed to the violence of the flames, which, ignited in some unknown way, were spreading rapidly when Mother Theodore noticed them as she was driving home one afternoon from a business trip to Terre Haute. On her arrival she mobilized at once a corps of firefighters, the four workmen on the farm, Père Michel, Jean Delahaye, Logan, and George Vermilion, and the two boys, followed by some fifteen Sisters, herself at their head. As usual on such occasions, Sister Saint Francis Xavier took her post of honor near the Tabernacle to implore the blessing of God upon their labors. As soon as they reached the woods, they divided into groups near the burning trees scattering and throwing back towards the original flames the blazing leaves on the ground by which the fire was approaching the farm buildings. They all worked strenuously for over an hour, up and down the deep ravines and through the woods. It was now growing dark, and the forest fire was burning less fiercely. Gradually the groups began to assemble.

All were finally accounted for except Mother Theodore, and the clear voices of the novices calling her through the woods brought no answering echo. Sister Mary Eudoxie had seen her last going beyond the forest boundaries. A few drops of rain began to fall, joyfully hailed as Sister Saint Francis Xavier's contribution to the evening's work, but increasing also the uneasiness of the Sisters over their still absent Mother. Finally Jean mounted to the summit of a hill and began to call with all his might. A faint faraway voice responded, and in the distance a moving light appeared. It was indeed Mother Theodore. Seeing that the fire was dying away, she had gone to the farmhouse for a lantern and returning had lost her way. For three quarters of an hour she had been sitting alone on a log in the woods resigned to pass the night or even a longer time there. Sister Olympiade was now also missing. She was found however at the barn where she had gone with Monseigneur and Father Corbe to see to the safety of the domestic animals and liberate the horses if the fire approached too close. Hurrying home through the gathering darkness, the Sisters thanked God for the abundant rain which was still falling, especially as it

⁴⁰ Saint John the Baptist, dedicated in 1852 by Father Corbe; pastor in 1854, Father Peter Leonard Brandt.

⁴¹ Bishop de la Hailandière also corresponded with his nephew, the Reverend Ernest Audran, pastor of the Vincennes Cathedral from 1846 to 1868.

⁴² DuPontavice Collection, 26 septembre, 1854.

was followed by a violent wind storm which would have driven the fire upon the convent buildings and perhaps destroyed them.

To Sister Mary Joseph the sight of the forest fire and the evening's experience were thrilling:

... a beautiful but a terrible spectacle ... she wrote to her brother Henri. I never saw nor could I imagine anything so grand, so magnificent. The dry leaves with which the ground was covered were catching fire from one minute to another. Streams and ribbons of flame ran through the trees and finding the old veterans of the forest dead at their post, arms still in hand, leaped upon them, gained their summits, and from that lofty point sent forth thousands of sparks and twisting flames in a fantastic effect beyond any fireworks imaginable. ...

Five of us were working with our two little boys, and at the end of an hour, up and down the ravines thirty or forty feet deep, slipping to the depths and climbing up again through the dead leaves on the opposite side, blessing our coifs which prevented us from being blinded by the thousands of small branches, and struggling across the great trees lying on the ground, the fire was still fleeing before us. ... Finally we were all together again. Everyone had an adventure to tell, struggles with the trunks of old oak trees, unexpected foot baths, and success in fighting the fire. Jean held in his hands a pretty white opossum which the flames had driven from its hole. ...

How powerful God is in His works. One could never imagine the awe-inspiring grandeur of the girdle of flames surrounding our grounds. ... Do not think our forests are flat. Nothing could be more broken. At least all I have seen from here to Terre Haute presents a series of hills cut by deep valleys. Northwest of Vincennes however the great prairies begin, known as pampas [*sic*], a vast and monotonous sea of verdure, its boundaries lost to view.⁴³

On September 12 Mother Theodore left Saint Mary's with the foundresses of the new mission of Lanesville, Sister Saint Charles, Sister Michel, and Sister Marianne. Father Alphonse Munschina had made arrangements with Monseigneur for securing Sisters for his school and had completed his preparations when, not having communicated with Mother Theodore and fearing some disappointment, he had hurriedly on August 31 again enlisted the services of Father DuPontavice. Lanesville, a village in southern Indiana midway between the historic old town of Corydon and New Albany, had been during the years (1813-1825) when Corydon had supplanted Vincennes as the state capital, an important stop on the stage line. The first Catholic in the vicinity was a Pennsylvanian named John Muller in whose house, and later in a small chapel erected by him, Mass was said once a year by the well-known Kentucky missionary Father Stephen T. Badin. Afterwards when Father Louis Neyron, who had come to America in 1835 with Bishop Bruté's band of recruits, was appointed pastor at New Albany, he visited Lanesville regularly.

Gradually numbers of German Catholics began to settle in the vicinity, and in 1843 Father Charles Opperman, resident pastor at Oldenburg, contributed to the purchase of a site and dwelling to be used for divine service. A frame church and parsonage stood on the summit of one of the picturesque wooded knobs some six miles north of the Ohio River when Father Munschina was appointed pastor in March, 1854.⁴⁴ His first

⁴³ *L'Indiana*, pp. 335-338.

⁴⁴ Alerding, *History of the Vincennes Diocese*, p. 340.

thought was for a school, and with commendable energy he set about his preparations, visiting personally the one hundred and twenty families of his congregation to assure their cooperation. He vacated the parsonage to serve as a residence for the expected Sisters and himself supervised the necessary alterations and repairs. The German parishioners gave the foundresses an enthusiastic welcome conducting them to the commodious convent with a religious procession. Though the school was small, only sixty girls and boys under twelve years, the Sisters were encouraged and consoled by their great need of religious instruction and by the appreciation of their parents. "Mother Theodore . . . says all these poor people wept for joy," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier.⁴⁵

Leaving Lanesville with Sister Basilide, the Foundress went on to Madison, where an accident occurred on the river which could have been fatal and was of permanent injury to her already failing health. The steamboat on which the two Sisters were traveling was to reach Madison at night, and they had left word to be called in time to disembark. As often happened however, they were forgotten. "No one thought of the nuns," and the boat was already on its way up the river towards Cincinnati when the oversight was discovered. The only alternative was to land at the first stop and take the next steamboat back. This they did and after some hours of waiting were already aboard the down river boat when they learned that it would not stop at Madison. The captain however agreed to land them in a canoe. They stopped in mid-current, and the river was rough. The two religious were just stepping into the skiff which had drawn up alongside when a man who had jumped into it pushed it with his foot driving the small boat away and precipitating both Sisters into the autumn-swollen river, at that point some twenty feet deep. Sister Basilide was rescued at once, but for five mortal minutes⁴⁶ the Foundress, submerged to the neck and in imminent danger of drowning, hung by her left hand to a part of the steamboat.

The situation was desperate. Sister Basilide distressed and frightened watched from the skiff with painful anxiety fearing from moment to moment that the poor sufferer's strength would fail, and that she would lose her grasp and sink. As last the canoe was brought under control, turned, and rowed back, and she was saved. A few minutes later they landed at Madison, in the already cool autumn weather, wet to the skin in their heavy habits. They drove at once to the convent where every precaution was taken to prevent pneumonia. Mother Theodore had suffered severely from exposure and shock, but she continued her journey to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods almost at once. On her arrival however she said hardly a word of the dreadful experience she had been through. She noted it briefly in the diary, but only considerably later and not fully till Sister Basilide returned to Saint Mary's almost a year afterwards in the summer of 1855, did the Community learn of the dangerous ordeal their Mother had endured. Mother Mary Cecilia recording the event years later in her manuscript life of Mother Theodore felt that this unfortunate accident was for the beloved Foundress the beginning of the end.

⁴⁵ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 392.

⁴⁶ Community Diary.

Mother's health was failing. Every year we saw her weaker and more ailing but . . . she omitted none of her duties. She visited the missions enduring the fatigues of traveling and at that time not only fatigue but real hardship, as a good deal of the route was made by stage over very bad roads, lodging poorly at night or going by canal boats so slow and so badly accommodated to afford necessary comforts. Nevertheless Mother had a strong physical constitution, though undermined by wretched health, and moral courage to a high degree, and with the fortitude that grace gives . . . she would probably have lived several years longer bearing up against a suffering body but still managing the affairs of the Community and directing its spiritual government [but for the accident on the river] which determined her habitual maladies into a fatal disease. . . . The speedy treatment [afterwards] no doubt prevented immediate results, but the final effects could not be turned off. Disease settled itself to . . . its work of death. This became apparent after some months.

The impression made on Mother was so terrible that she did not mention it when she returned and never spoke of it to anyone. She came home worse than usual, it is true, but we were so used to seeing her sick that we did not suspect any particular cause . . . other than the fatigues of travel which were getting harder as her health became worse. . . . From this date Mother's poor health sensibly changed for much worse. During the fall and winter which followed this accident she was so disabled that she could not attend to affairs as she had always done.⁴⁷

In fact, a severe illness followed upon her return home, one of the epidemics of the time, and at the end of two weeks she was still so weak that a single hour at her desk exhausted her completely. "She has given us great anxiety," wrote Sister Mary Joseph to her mother. "She gave us no details [of her accident], and we got them only later from others. She was very ill afterwards . . . and recovered very slowly. She is so good, so necessary to her Community that we are distressed when she is ill."⁴⁸ A second attack kept her in bed for two weeks till November 3 when she was able to assist at Mass for the first time.

During these weeks of suffering in October after her return from Madison, the Foundress found strength to record in the diary an event of major importance:

On the night from the seventh to the eighth [of October] the silence of our forests of Saint Mary's which from the beginning of the world had been broken only by the cries of savages and of animals, was greatly disturbed by the whistling and puffing of the steam engines which passed Saint Mary's for the first time on the way to Paris. The road is not finished, nor will it be for six months, nevertheless the cars go by Saint Mary's every day.⁴⁹

The arrival of "the cars," as they were called, and the railroad routed so advantageously for the school, in reality inaugurated a new era for the Community by permanently bridging the gulf which had isolated Saint Mary-of-the-Woods during the Wabash flood months every year. The paper towns made and broken by the river traffic were being equaled in number during these formative years by the flourishing localities which languished and died when the railroads passed them by. It was a far cry in 1854 from the autumn day in 1840 when Mother Theodore had seen her first locomotive on the old South Amboy and Camden Railroad

⁴⁷ Manuscript Life of Mother Theodore by Mother Mary Cecilia, pp. 65-68.

⁴⁸ 15 octobre, 1854. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁹ Community Diary.

in New Jersey. Now the railroad with its one compelling advantage, speed, had already gone far toward superseding the river and canal transportation all over the Middle West. Even as early as 1836 a railroad, the Madison road to Indianapolis, had been one of the projects in the Great Internal Improvement Bill of that year. It was the only railroad in Indiana in the 1840's.

Chauncey Rose was among the first in Terre Haute however to perceive the superior possibilities of the railroad as a means of transportation even before in 1849 at the price of incredible efforts the Wabash and Erie Canal had reached the city. Many people saw immense handicaps to the progress of the state in the river and canal transportation unless American commercial initiative was content to hibernate in winter quarters for half the year. Mother Theodore had astutely characterized the Wabash in 1840 as a little river navigable during only a part of the year,⁵⁰ and the incredibly slow pace of the canal boats on a shallow artificial waterway easily put out of use by a storm or a small landslide and sealed by ice during the winter, doomed the expensive project even before it was entirely finished. The Terre Haute and Richmond Railroad, now a part of the Pennsylvania system, was planned as early as 1847. Chauncey Rose was its first president, and his influence, his capital, and his business acumen assured its success.

It soon divided into two parts of which the Terre Haute and Indianapolis route was steadily pushed to completion in four years. It was the best of the Indiana railroads.⁵¹ Finished in February, 1852,⁵² by the following May a single train was running daily to Indianapolis. Before long this service was doubled, although for years only two daily trains ran each day. By this time the trip to Madison could be made entirely by rail. The Sisters spent the night at Saint Vincent's in Terre Haute leaving next morning by "the cars" at six-thirty for Indianapolis where they boarded the Madison train. They found the coaches an immense improvement upon any previous means of transportation, roomy and comfortable, "handsomely got up, furnished on the inside with red cut velvet cushioned seats, the fare to Indianapolis, two dollars per person."⁵³ On the through trip to Madison covering the one hundred and sixty miles in eight hours, the fare was \$4.25. These early trains never ran on Sunday and always stopped en route for meals. The long hours of travel were now enjoyed despite the soot and sparks from the wood-burning engines, especially by the young Sisters, and Sister Ann Mary Hayes wrote some clever verses on the delights of riding on the cars which were read and laughed over by the Community.

The railroads gradually improved. The trains made better time, and an express train to Indianapolis with only three stops was running by October, 1854. Even from the beginning the trains ran fairly well on schedule, an immense improvement over the interminable delays of the canal and riverboats. The large crowds, from no one knew where, who appeared to take the cars at the railroad depot as it was called, on the

⁵⁰ *J. and L.*, p. 55.

⁵¹ Esarey, *History of Indiana*, vol. 2, p. 721.

⁵² *Wabash Courier*, February 21, 1852.

⁵³ *Wabash Courier*, May 20, 1852.

National Road in Terre Haute were a constant source of amazement to spectators. Even before the Indianapolis Railroad was entirely finished in December, 1851, the *Wabash Courier* had reported eighty persons crowding into a freight train of two cars, a box car and an open car for hauling rails along the line.⁵⁴ A fine train of cars arriving and departing daily, with omnibuses always on hand to meet them was one of the sights of Terre Haute. The locomotives, smaller than ours, had immense smokestacks, and each had its own name. One engine on the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad was called the Michael G. Bright.⁵⁵

In the summer of 1853 work began on the badly needed railroad across the river to the West called the Terre Haute and Alton, now an integral link in the Big Four Railroad System. Mother Theodore had taken ten shares in the railroad at once and on January 4, 1853, marked her first payment of one hundred dollars in her *Registre des Récettes et Dépenses*, as her account book is entitled though most of the items were by this time written in English. A second similar payment followed in October and others at intervals up to January, 1855. Sister Basilide tells us that it was due to Mother Theodore's representations that the Terre Haute and Alton was laid through Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The railroad bridge across the Wabash was the first undertaking, and the workmen awaited only the subsidence of the spring floods on the river in 1853 to sink the foundations of the stone piers and abutments.⁵⁶ The laborers in June were already engaged on the west side of the river in the hard work of "grubbing and grading" as specified in the contracts, preparing the right of way for the tracks. Although the Irish immigrants had dug the Wabash and Erie Canal in two almost equal groups of bitterly inimical Corkonians and Ulstermen, they were aided largely in building the railroads in Indiana by the farmers along the route, all working alike for a dollar and ten cents a day.⁵⁷

By the heavy labor of pick and shovel, the work progressed steadily reaching eventually the maximum achievement of a half mile of track per day. At the end of September, 1853, when driving to Terre Haute, Mother Theodore could pass the construction gangs who had already placed several piers of the bridge and had progressed a considerable distance across the river bottom towards the bluffs. In October the contractors had rented a site in the village from the Community for use as a shop till April, 1855. In March, 1854, the bridge, "an elegant and substantial structure" was completed at the cost of one hundred thousand dollars. Once this side of the bottom, the Irish laborers flocked to Father Corbe's little church at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to Sunday Mass. Their extensive ablutions at the holy water font attracted Sister Mary Joseph's attention, but the older Sisters were deeply edified by the ardent faith and piety of these poor immigrants, far from home and country, wearing out their lives in hard and ill-paid labor. "Our dear Irish" were a perennial source of wonder to Sister Saint Francis Xavier.

Two hundred families were living in the vicinity of Saint Mary's all

⁵⁴ December 24, 1851.

⁵⁵ For Mary Korbly McNutt's grandfather.

⁵⁶ *Wabash Courier*, June 1, 1853.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

during this oppressive summer. There was much sickness among them, and several men perished in landslides along the track. Their faith and confidence in the presence of death, and their gratitude to have the last Sacraments convinced Father Corbe that their salvation was assured;⁵⁸ when they expired shortly after receiving the last indulgences, he felt sure that they went straight to heaven. Sister Olympiade found them badly in need of the good food and remedies she dispensed generously, but in less need of her spiritual ministrations, though the men could fight "like lions" in the perennial battles with the hated "Far Downs."⁵⁹ Any priest had power over them except the Englishman, Father Shawe, whose good offices were of no avail. One of these fights raged for three days near Saint Mary's, February 18-20, 1854.⁶⁰ In August the work was suspended for a time owing to the influence of the Know-Nothings, leaving "our poor Irish," as Father Corbe wrote, "without a penny and without work."⁶¹ In the previous May, the engines and a few cars were already running over the distance from Saint Mary's to Terre Haute covering it in ten minutes, and on October 7 they passed through on the way to Paris.

Occasionally the trains broke down, and the old stages were brought out, dusted off, and put into use again. Before the railroad reached Paris a four-horse post coach line through the village connected with the trains. The stage lines still continued regular service for years in remote sections. The railroads proved their superiority, however, by running even when the river was raging and by rapid repairs to injured bridges while the canal would be out of use for weeks. When the river rose six feet and a half in one night in May, 1854, owing to a continuous twenty-four-hour downpour, the canal aqueduct over Sugar Creek in Vigo County was carried away, and the canal bed injured to the extent of fifty thousand dollars, requiring several weeks for repairs. Mother Theodore, a patient and experienced traveler, had to make two attempts at this time to get through on her way to Vincennes. The railroad was but little injured, however, was repaired at once, and the trains kept running. Accidents were frequent though, largely owing to poor construction work on the roads and to the carelessness of employees.

Domestic animals and especially cows grazing along the track led to fencing the right of way, and depots were gradually erected. Francis Leseure had replaced Jacob Thralls as postmaster, and influence was being used in October, 1855, to have the Saint Mary's station⁶² placed at a distance from the convent. Mother Theodore appealed at once to the company, and within a week the president in a personal call promised her to place the station on the Community property.⁶³ A few weeks later she was signing a contract for the erection of a cottage conveniently located for the use of the agent.

Saint Mary's was now served also by the Evansville and Crawfordsville Railroad, with trains running conveniently from Terre Haute to Vincennes

⁵⁸ *An Apostolic Woman*, p. 391.

⁵⁹ Orangemen.

⁶⁰ Community Diary.

⁶¹ A Mgr. Martin, 21 août, 1854. S.M.W.A.

⁶² The name was changed to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1912.

⁶³ Community Diary.

early in October, 1854.⁶⁴ Fathers Corbe and Lalumiere traveled by rail to see the Bishop in November, and Mother Theodore's trip to Evansville was made in seven hours on January 21, 1855. The long northern route to Fort Wayne could also now be made partly by rail. Mother Theodore noted a happy journey from Peru to Terre Haute by the cars in one day on May 9, 1854. Along this route large flocks of cranes, wild geese, and ducks rose from the marshy prairies as the train of twenty cars glided along, and small herds of deer watched from afar. By February, 1856, passenger cars were running from Terre Haute to Saint Louis. The railroads were already destroying the steamboat business on the Ohio and the Wabash, and though they combined their activities for a time, it was not for long.

Saint Mary's Institute, as the school now began generally to be called, at once incorporated its improved transportation facilities "to Terre Haute and the North" in the advertisements appearing in the Terre Haute papers before classes were resumed in February, 1854. The term *female*, prized nowadays in college charters because of its proof of priority in the field, does not appear after 1854. Special chartered trains ran to and from Terre Haute for the *distribution des prix* that year, returning repeatedly in the evening for the accommodation of guests. The mails were coming by rail also by November though the old mud wagons substituted now and then in an emergency, during the first year. Delays and minor accidents were not lacking. Mother Theodore spent two hours and a half on the short trip to Terre Haute the first time she attempted it early in January, 1855. The railroad, however, had proved itself, and the roads multiplied in Indiana during the 1850 decade. Many were short and almost local in character. The connections were often poor, and there was much waiting for trains for many hours at out of the way junctions, but the railroads cost only half as much as the canals to construct, their capacity was in every respect equal, and their speed even from the first was double that of the canals. The Iron Horse had come to stay.

Mother Mary was now sending one more recruit from Ruillé, the last. Bishop Martin of Natchitoches had asked for Sisters from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for his diocese immediately after his consecration in November, 1853, and Mother Theodore found it hard indeed to refuse this old friend. She had no local superiors trained for a house so far away, but she urged him to apply to Mother Mary at Ruillé, and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods would give him the requisite English teachers, especially as Bishop de Saint-Palais in favor of so old a friend withdrew his opposition to their leaving the diocese. Sisters for a very desirable location at Thibodaux, Louisiana, were also asked for repeatedly, but this project, too, was never realized. As Father Corbe wrote to Bishop Martin, "the number of Sisters is constantly increasing, but not yet sufficiently to fill the needs and requests." A year or two later the situation would probably be changed. "Soon they will suffice amply, however, as the Bishop intends to divide his diocese, and the Community's field of labor will be proportionately reduced."⁶⁵

Bishop Martin eventually secured Sisters of Charity in France, and on

⁶⁴ *Wabash Courier*, October 7, 1854.

⁶⁵ 21 août, 1854. S.M.W.A.

his return to his diocese in October, 1854, Mother Theodore's two nieces, Sister Mary Theodore, who had been for six years a Sister of Providence at Ruillé, and her younger sister, Mlle. Frances Le Touzé, were to accompany him, via New Orleans. They had been ready to leave France in the preceding April, and Sister Mary Theodore had paid the usual farewell visit to her family. The Bishop's return, however, was delayed, and the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods learned his whereabouts only from the papers. Finally they received the news that he had sailed from Havre in mid-October. At last a telegram announced the landing of his party and the departure of the two sisters for Saint Mary's by way of Saint Louis on December 7.

No further tidings came of the two travelers, neither of whom spoke English, for over two weeks. At Saint Mary's uneasiness was extreme as yellow fever was raging in New Orleans. Finally they arrived on Christmas eve after seventeen days on a journey made usually by that time in four. Their travels had been marked by dangers and delays. Without Bishop Martin on the Mississippi River boat, they could not make themselves understood till one of the passengers, a gentleman who spoke both French and English, came to their assistance. The steamboat made excellent time both day and night even gaining upon its schedule till they reached the mouth of the Ohio where the water was very low. From then on they traveled only at night and sometimes made no more than from nine to fifteen miles a day. Accidents were frequent, and the sight of burnt and wrecked boats saddened and frightened the travelers. Four hundred Germans were in the steerage, and an epidemic carried off twenty-one persons, all young, in two or three days. "On the fourteenth day," wrote Sister Mary Theodore to Bishop Martin, "the boat stopped suddenly fourteen leagues from Saint Louis, and another boat took off the cargo. Next day we reached the city in spite of the ice which was considerable."⁶⁶ A long railroad journey followed, and the two travelers, not recognizing the American pronunciation of the name, passed through Vincennes without stopping though the Sisters there had been looking for them for weeks.

When at last they reached Saint Mary's, Sister Mary Joseph was the first to meet them. She happened to be at Father Corbe's house when they arrived, and she rushed to tell Mother Theodore. A genuine French welcome made the two newcomers feel at home at once. They were laden with letters and souvenirs especially from Saint-Servan. They had learned a few words of English en route and were able to read it almost at once. Sister Mary Theodore, who to the end of her life wrote a beautiful clear script, and the print known as French *ronde*, began very soon to give lessons in penmanship to the postulants. Their aunt, Mother Theodore, had now resumed her *train de vie ordinaire*⁶⁷ after the two severe illnesses which had followed the accident on the river, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier was gradually recovering from the attack of pneumonia from which she had been suffering for two weeks.

December 8, 1854, had been the momentous occasion of the solemn promulgation of the decree of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The Catholic world was awaiting it with joyful expectancy, but the feast

⁶⁶ 2 janvier, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁷ Usual round of duties.

passed away at Saint Mary's, and no news came of the great event which had taken place at Rome. On Saturday, January 13, 1855, Father Corbe received his copy of the *Univers* containing the epoch-making news and discreetly the next day, feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, announced it during his sermon. The solemn *Te Deum* and the pealing of the convent bell inaugurated a day given over to thanksgiving and rejoicing. The postulants went from shrine to shrine indoors and out-of-doors singing canticles. Beginning with Bertaudière's Madonna in the chapel, every statue of Our Lady was surrounded with lights and flowers, for at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Our Lady's image already reigned in every department from Our Lady of the Valley in the laundry to the kitchen. Though Sister Saint Francis's illness had now lasted for five weeks, on this joyful day she was able to come down to the chapel again.

The new addition to the academy, affording extra classroom and dormitory space, had now been completed and was in use for some weeks. Some of the old buildings, primitive log structures no longer needed near the convent but still sturdy and strong, had been removed to the village. The little log chapel where the Sisters had found the Blessed Sacrament on the evening of their arrival in 1840 was falling from age and had to be razed. The departure of the builders and carpenters employed for so many months gave added housing space for the workmen, a necessity, as both Jean Delahaye and Logan Hagan were now married.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FOUNDRESS'S LAST YEAR

"I am truly tired, but I shall rest, I feel, only in Heaven."

MOTHER THEODORE

REPEATED echoes of the momentous events of December 8, 1854, in the Eternal City continued to reverberate in the Vigo County woods during January, 1855. On a page among news of debates in the British Parliament between Disraeli and Robert Peel on the Crimean War and the text of Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade," the *Wabash Courier* announced as taking place at Saint Joseph's Church, "a nightly jubilee . . . to celebrate the new dogma lately pronounced by the Pope of Rome from his Throne in St. Peter's on the 8th of December, 1854." This news was followed in that unexpected place by a correct statement of the substance of the decree. "It is a dogma of faith that the Most Blessed Virgin in the first instant of her conception by a singular privilege and grace of God in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, was preserved from all touch of original sin."¹ The commemorative jubilee was held throughout the diocese. The exercises in the village, Mass and Benediction with two sermons daily preached by Father Chassé, preceded the Terre Haute celebration, and much good was accomplished in both places, many careless Catholics returning to their religious duties.²

A last and sorrowful echo of the promulgation of this great dogma reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on February 6 in the news of the death of Bishop Bouvier. "Braving like a Christian hero danger, illness, death itself to obey the call of the Vicar of Christ upon earth and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he has gone to a better life,"³ wrote the Foundress in the letter circular which she sent at once to the Sisters on the missions. A funeral service was performed in the chapel of the motherhouse which was draped in black. Each Sister was ordered to offer three Communions, and in each house for thirty days morning and evening five Paters and Aves for the repose of his soul were to be recited, the very suffrages he himself had laid down in the French Rule for the decease of a Bishop of Le Mans.⁴ "Saint Mary-of-the-Woods owes to him its very existence," continued the circular. "This saintly and learned prelate was for us in our days of darkness what the cloud was for the Israelites in the desert, a shelter and a light. In our days of peace, he was ever a father." Mother Theodore's ordinarily facile pen faltered before the real magnitude of the debt which the Community owed to this magnanimous prelate whose great-hearted charity never forgot the exiles in the Indiana forest and never hesitated to advise and assist them.

¹ *Wabash Courier*, January 27, 1855.

² *Community Diary*, January 21, 1855.

³ February 10, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁴ *Constitutions et Règles*, p. 23.

The end of his life harmonized with his character of noble Christian Bishop and crowned it with a final heroic sacrifice. When the Bishops convened in Rome in response to the Holy Father's invitation on November 20, Bishop Bouvier though specially invited with Cardinal Gousset, Archbishop of Rheims, to represent the French hierarchy was unable to be present. Despite his advanced age and his failing health, he had started from Le Mans for Paris on October 13 accompanied by his private secretary, Abbé Sebaux, later Bishop of Angoulême. When he left for Lyons on October 20, he was already suffering from an epidemic which had broken out in both Le Mans and Paris. When he reached the palace of Cardinal de Bonald at Lyons he was too ill for an entire month to be moved. Finally improving a little, he left Lyons on December 1 embarking from his native land which he was never to see again in this life on December 5 at Marseilles. Going on board, the Bishop was very ill. The sea was rough and most of the passengers were very seasick, but the vessel next day reached Cività Vecchia. Every care was taken there to facilitate the Bishop's journey by carriage to Rome where he arrived on the evening of December 6.

A spacious and comfortable suite on the ground floor of the Quirinal Palace had been placed at his disposal by the well-known gracious hospitality of Pope Pius IX and he was able, borne in the Holy Father's special portable chair, to assist from a reserved place near the Papal Throne at the magnificent ceremony in Saint Peter's on December 8, when His Holiness, surrounded by the College of Cardinals and over two hundred Bishops from every quarter of the globe,⁵ pronounced from his throne in a voice broken by tears the great decree which had been the object of the hopes and prayers of saints and prelates and the entire Catholic world for hundreds of years. He heard the great *Te Deum* pouring forth from forty thousand hearts and echoing through the grand Basilica and the bells pealing from every tower in Rome. "I have seen what I longed to see, and I have come here to die," were his words on that memorable day.⁶ He was able also from his windows to view the illumination of Saint Peter's in the evening, but his days were now numbered. Public prayers for his recovery were offered everywhere in his diocese before the Blessed Sacrament exposed.

On Christmas morning, however, the venerable prelate became suddenly so much worse that it was decided to administer the sacrament of Extreme Unction which he received with admirable piety and resignation in the presence of many prelates and priests and especially the ecclesiastics and laymen of his diocese who were in Rome. He made his profession of faith especially in the newly proclaimed dogma of the Immaculate Conception. "It has long been my conviction," he said. "I firmly believe in this dogma as revealed truth." Next morning, December 26, he received Holy Viaticum from the Bishop of Marseilles during the Holy Sacrifice celebrated in his room. The same day, in the afternoon, the dying prelate received the unusual honor of a personal visit from the Holy Father who remained with him almost a half hour speaking to him in his native

⁵ Bernard O'Reilly, *Life of Pope Pius IX* (Kenedy, New York, 1883) p. 317.

⁶ Chevereau, *Les Derniers instants de Mgr. J. B. Bouvier* (Au Mans, Monnoyer, 1855) p. 37.

French with a tenderness and affection which deeply touched the Bishop. "Qu'il est bon,"⁷ exclaimed the Pope on leaving the sick room and expressed his admiration of the presence of mind and the lucidity and rectitude of thought of the dying Bishop.

Completely conscious to the end and replying himself to the prayers for the agonizing, pressing again and again to his lips the indulgenced crucifix and the medal of the Immaculate Conception which the Holy Father had brought him, John Baptist Bouvier breathed his last on Friday, December 29, 1854, at three in the afternoon, the very hour when Our Saviour died for us. He was in truth a martyr to his devotion to the Holy See and to the honor of Mary Immaculate, as with his age and infirmities the voyage to Rome was beyond his strength. "Do not weep," said the Holy Father. "He has died the death of the saints. He is in heaven."⁸ His obsequies were celebrated both at Rome and Le Mans with great solemnity, and his remains lie today in the crypt of his ancient and illustrious cathedral.

The death of so unchangeably devoted a friend was an irreparable loss to the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Mother Theodore expressed her grief and her hopes for his continued assistance in the diary:

How beautiful and how Christian was his death! O my father, you have given me a rendezvous in heaven. Obtain that one day I may be there with you. My God, place among Thy angels and elect him who follows such a goodly number of saints who like him were Bishops of Le Mans.⁹

Mother Theodore counted Abbé Sebaux, whom she had met during her stay in Europe in 1843, as among the group of friends in France whose interest and sympathy in the Community's trials were never failing. Intimately aware, from his position of secretary to Bishop Bouvier, of the extent of the Foundress's sufferings and crosses, he had once at the crisis of the Community's affairs in September, 1847, inserted a few words of encouragement and sympathy of his own¹⁰ in a letter he was sending for his venerable prelate, assuring her that her heavy crosses were an indubitable token of immense future blessings and graces. From this almost unknown friend she now received some precious souvenirs of their deceased Father, one of his albs which she marked at once with indelible ink and reserved for use on the great feasts only, a medallion with his hair, ten photographs and ten copies of Abbé Chevereau's booklet on the Bishop's last moments, which were distributed among the missions, now ten in number, in order to perpetuate to the future the memory of the greatest of the benefactors of the Congregation of Providence.

Sister Mary Theodore and her sister Frances were now comfortably domiciled at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and were learning English rapidly. Sister Mary Theodore in particular was very studious and in the opinion of their teacher, Sister Mary Eudoxie, showed considerable facility even in conquering the *th* and *ch* sounds so difficult for the French. She wrote

⁷ "How good he is."

⁸ Chevereau, *Derniers Instants*, p. 53.

⁹ Community Diary.

¹⁰ 9 septembre, 1847. S.M.W.A.

to France a few months after her arrival, giving her impressions of America, its language and customs:

I am studying every day with my good Sister Saint Francis, not only English but all the various sciences . . . which it is indispensable to know for they are taught in all the schools. Here the children must be taught things of which they will never make any use, solely that they may have the pleasure of saying they learned them. . . . The English is pronounced with the mouth almost closed; half the letters are not sounded and many of the words are written quite contrary to the way in which they must be pronounced.

We are now having the happiness of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament during the Forty Hours. It is the only place in Indiana where they have this favor. It has been quite cold for about six weeks but the Americans hardly prepare themselves against it at all. They take the weather as it comes without precaution, or at least I perceive none.¹¹

The two sisters had brought with them a number of useful objects from Madame Le Fer, who eagerly seized the opportunity of their voyage for her semi-annual box. Five of Sister Saint Francis's and Sister Mary Joseph's brothers, like so many Bretons, had entered the French naval service in various capacities. Charles, the eldest, Irma's favorite brother, who had accompanied her when she went to Soulaines as a postulant in 1839, known professionally as Captain de la Motte, had been in command of a French ship for three years in New Caledonia, where he had rendered signal service to the missionaries several times risking his life, as was duly reported in the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*. He later married a charming young Spanish lady, Senorita Natalia Valdivieso, whom he had met in Chile. A younger brother, Paul Le Fer, a captain in the French merchant marine, commanded a large vessel, the *Grand Condé*, which plied between France and the island of Mauritius.

We have seen how generously the family contributed to furnishing the altar of the chapel of the new motherhouse, and the brothers brought back many interesting and valuable things from their voyages, many of which found their way to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The Le Fers were not wealthy, but all their numerous relatives and friends delighted to contribute to Madame Le Fer's boxes which came regularly twice a year. She seems to have had an understanding with her daughters by which the contents of her boxes were to be distributed in her name. Thus "le bon Père Corbe" was never forgotten, and Père Michel was deeply touched when he too and the rising sodality and friends who had shown special kindness to the Community were also remembered. Sister Saint Francis Xavier tells of the pleasure of everyone when at noon recreation Father Corbe put his hatchet under the lid of a newly arrived box, and revealed its contents to the delighted oh's and ah's of the assembled Sisters and postulants. Sister Mary Joseph gave an account to her mother of the scene which greeted the box which arrived late in 1854¹² after six weeks in the New York customhouse:

The box has come and is open, the large and beautiful box filled with so many good things. Great has been the rejoicing for all. The flower seeds were so precious that they could not be confided to Jean, hardly even to the earth. Father Corbe

¹¹ A ma Sœur Eudoxie, 20 février, 1855. S.M.W.A.

¹² 15 octobre, 1854. S.M.W.A.

opened it with his hatchet, and everyone took a parcel and revealed its treasures. We will tell you all the disposals, the presents, the pleasures. There is also in it something for Mr. DuPontavice. Everything was in perfect condition except the steel pearls. The strings of Sister Olympiade's purse would not pull, but Father Corbe was delighted that Mme. Le Fer had even remembered Père Michel. Sister Mary Cecilia has promised prayers in return for her night slippers.

Many friends had contributed and letters from the family and others had made the box a bearer of happiness. Roquet and Sister Monique, both of whom were from Saint-Servan, are well. "We have a little heaven on earth" is a final comment.

Not with anything approaching the regularity of Madame Le Fer's generous offerings, but now and then as they could, the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods sent collections of "little nothings," as Mother Theodore called them, which were, however, valued highly by their recipients in Europe. It was for one of these boxes that Mother Theodore had wished the daguerreotype of Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Some of their friends were interested in Indian relics, which were still available in the 1850's in the vicinity of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, the old hunting ground of the Kickapoos and Mascoutins. Sister Mary Joseph had sent an Indian arrow to her confessor, Father Collet at Saint-Servan, and a friend who saw it asked for one. Captain Charles Le Fer was a connoisseur in shells, and greatly appreciated the beautiful ones which the postulants could gather during an annual all-day outing at the large sand bar at Durkee's Ferry in summer when the river was low. "A true child of the forest" was the name Sister Saint Francis Xavier gave to one of these boxes containing pressed flowers, nuts, stones, shells, moleskins, etc.

Truly while writing the list for the custom house, she wrote to Madame Parmentier, I had to stop to laugh. . . . Our box is awaited with impatience at Saint-Servan and especially by my eldest brother, who in point of shells never says enough. . . . We had much pleasure in preparing our little presents. You know from experience the happiness of giving. Our friends Veillot, Aubineau, Mame, Dupont, and de la Valette have had their part. I will enumerate some of our gifts. M. Veillot has a tobacco pouch of moleskin. M. Mame and Mme. de la Valette have each one of the mats you sent us four or five years ago.¹³

Madame Le Fer received another of these and Bishop Bouvier shortly before his death one, too, for his coffee service. Elvire even put in this box two or three small studs received from New York the previous years as souvenirs to her young men cousins. She well knew the pleasure that her little American remembrances would give in France. They even sent to Ruillé and Saint-Servan Madame Parmentier's and Madame Bayer's letters filled with religious news.

Sister Mary Joseph did not fail to let her mother know of their needs. "Do not forget to gather some good lavender seeds," she wrote. "Ours did not grow." And at another time she asked for some pretty pieces of music for the guitar which she was teaching at the academy, "new and not too difficult."¹⁴ also for crochet and netting needles. Toys and dolls for the younger children, dainty knicknacks for the older girls for premiums, and warm clothing for the severe Indiana winters were always welcome.

¹³ 15 novembre, [1854]. S.M.W.A.

¹⁴ 15 août, 1855. S.M.W.A.

Ancient finery a little tarnished came to life under Elvire's skillful touch. Cecile Le Fer sent her wedding dress, and Sister Saint Francis recognized "Eugénie's little lilac hat." French books of piety were highly prized. The delays and disappointments of the first years in America when the boxes had to be sent through Edouard Bayer in Brooklyn and the Terre Haute merchants and M. Marzion at Havre were now practically over. Wells Fargo and Adams Express, established throughout the West,¹⁵ had now added international facilities¹⁶ to their reliable domestic service, and boxes could go and come with a minimum of delay and expense. The attentions of the Le Fer family were a boon during all these years to the struggling mission of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods since they resulted in a stream of all sorts of gifts desirable and useful. At first they sent quantities of glass jars and bottles at transportation charges which soon became prohibitive. They were hard to procure in Indiana at that time and were eminently useful and eventually appeared on the shelves of Sister Olympiade's little pharmacy on the edge of the ravine. Mme. Le Fer averred that her greatest happiness was to contribute in any way to the well-being of the Community and thus give pleasure to her daughters.

During these cold months of 1855 of which Mother Theodore had written in November in the diary, "O my God, we accept and we offer all we shall have to suffer this winter,"¹⁷ one of the most promising of the young teachers at the academy, Sister Josephine, "a charming novice, full of piety, of intelligence, and innocence, whose goodness endears her to everyone," as Sister Saint Francis Xavier, her mistress of novices, described her, was dying. At Christmas three Sisters had been ill, Sister Saint Francis Xavier with pneumonia for many weeks, Sister Olympiade, too, ordinarily so rugged and so strong, and Sister Josephine. Sister Saint Francis and Sister Olympiade gradually recovered, but Sister Josephine was evidently fading away.

Though she clung to her duties in the classroom to the last, Mother Theodore sent her in February to Vincennes to consult Dr. Baty and remain under his care. It was already too late, and he pronounced immediately the dreaded verdict, consumption. She returned home then to the infirmary to die, much worse and suffering greatly. She could retain nothing and was worn by a racking cough. She grew a little better, however, and was able later to be up and even to do a little teaching. She was greatly loved by everyone. "How I long to keep her many years for our Congregation," wrote Sister Saint Francis, but she was longing to die.

She was one of the four children of Maria Reed Monaghan¹⁸ who, reduced from comfortable circumstances to penury almost over night by the death of her husband, was accommodated with a home on the grounds of Providence during Mother Theodore's absence in France. The little girls went first to the village school then to the academy, and the son Thomas was a seminarian at Vincennes. Hannah came to the novitiate at fifteen and received the name of Sister Josephine. She was sent at sixteen to the academy where her intelligence and her spirit of study made her

¹⁵ *Wabash Courier*, April 21, 1852.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1853.

¹⁷ 12 novembre, 1854.

¹⁸ Chapter XV.

botany class a delight to her pupils. Her charming candor and innocence, her generosity and uprightness were only surpassed by her precocious wisdom and dignity in dealing with pupils but little younger than herself. Never would she permit in her presence the least reflection upon the absent, and no duty was too heavy for her courage. On holidays when hours of extra surveillance were required with the pupils, Sister Josephine was always at hand to offer her services or to substitute. Her heart was evidently irrevocably fixed on God.

A great sorrow had already come into her life. A half-sister who had married a man in easy circumstances came up from the South and succeeded in persuading Thomas to return with her to retrieve the family fortunes. He died almost immediately of yellow fever, and his sister mourned him long and sincerely. Her only thought afterwards was to prepare to die, and she was sinking gradually but surely despite the ardent prayers and the devoted care of the Community.

She was now confined to her bed almost all day and received Holy Communion for the first time in the infirmary on the first of March. On Holy Thursday she was permitted to pronounce her perpetual vows in the chapel to which she was able to drag herself almost for the last time. Afterwards she grew better and offered herself with complete resignation to die or to live again and work for God, even if she were privileged to teach only one child to know and love Him. During April as the weather was warm and dry, she was able to go out often in the carriage, one day even as far as Terre Haute.

Dr. Read still had hopes of saving her, but Mother Theodore was not deceived, and on April 27 she received Extreme Unction, the first to be anointed in the new motherhouse, "quite happy to die, so innocent and pure," remarked the Foundress. Father Corbe during these last weeks brought her Holy Communion three times a week. Her weakness was extreme, and one day she said regretfully to Mother Theodore that during an entire morning she had been able to say only a Pater and Ave. "Do not try to do so," answered the Foundress. "Say only from time to time, 'My God, I love You.' " "Ah," answered Sister Josephine, "He has known that for a long time." She promised the Sisters and her grieving mother, who spent hours daily at her bedside, to deliver their messages and remember their intentions and assured Dr. Read, too, that she would not forget his kindness when she reached heaven. The spirit of mortification which had distinguished her in life was with her to the end, and in her last hours she refused the refreshing drinks which were offered her and even begged her infirmarian not even to moisten her lips.

She died on the morning of Sunday, May 13, the rosary in one hand, the lighted candle in the other, and conscious to the last. She was buried by the side of Sister Angelina, who had been the first to be laid in the new Community cemetery near the little woodland chapel of Saint Anne. Sister Saint Francis records that grief-stricken Father Corbe could hardly finish the prayers at her grave. Mother Theodore wrote one of the most beautiful of her circulars¹⁹ upon this saintly young Sister who carried untarnished to her grave the beautiful robe of her baptismal innocence.

¹⁹ Printed in full in *J. and L.*, pp. 402-404.

She recalled to them her unshakable faith, her unbounded confidence in God, her love for her Beloved most ardent and strong, her amiability, her charity, her forgetfulness of self. One thing only she did not commend. Sister Josephine had not taken the proper care of her health, "the only cause of pain she ever gave me," added the Foundress, "for the health of a Sister of Providence belongs not to herself but to God."

Two other accounts of her death have been preserved. A long one by Sister Saint Francis Xavier was sent to France. The other, written probably by Dr. Read, was printed in the *Wabash Courier*.²⁰

SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS, INDIANA.

Died of consumption, at Providence, Saint Mary's, on Sunday morning the 13th inst., Sister Josephine (Hannah Monaghan) aged 21 years.

As a nun in homeliest guise she knelt
Veiled in her veil, crowned in her silver crown
Her crown of lilies as the Spouse of Christ.

Thus is stricken out from the Sisterhood of Providence one of its brightest gems and purest lights, leaving a cheerless void, a chill as of the grave. Young, beautiful and accomplished, she is withered as the blossom in the bud.

"A blighted flower
Dead to the sunbeams and the shower,
A broken gem."

Of gifted and highly cultivated intellect, she was one of the most accomplished teachers at Saint Mary's, commanding the love of all her scholars by her affectionate and cheerful manners, admiration by the gentle and Christian graces of her heart—love, charity, and forgiveness.

Not more in intellectual attainments did she excel than in her holy and prayerful life; and during all her protracted and painful illness, relying upon the promises of her Savior, she manifested that cheerful and happy frame of mind so becoming to the Christian who has full confidence in the holy promise of Heaven to those pure in heart.

Never repining, never regretting, she looked forward to her death with anxious hope, and with holy prayers upon her lips for Divine blessings upon all her friends, and with bright visions of an opening, glorious future, sweetly and gently she breathed out her pure spirit to God.

How sad that one so young should die yet how sweet that the quiet grave should close on holy innocence, and that her spirit so soon should return to Him who gave it.

Of all that stricken sisterhood she, alone, is calm. She sleeps the quiet, still sleep of death in the silent forest Church yard she so much loved where

"Oft will affliction breathe her plaint
To that rude Shrine's departed saint,
And deem that spirits of the blest
There shed sweet influence o'er her head."

R.

The Know-Nothing agitation now rendered the utmost caution and care an absolute necessity when the most innocent procedures were open to misinterpretation. At least one violent personal attack against Mother Theodore, bringing up the old calumny of keeping novices against their will, had appeared in the *Terre Haute* papers. Some days before Sister

²⁰ May 19, 1855.

Josephine's death a young woman, Catherine Seip by name, arrived at the novitiate, having left home without the knowledge of her father who was attempting to compel her to marry. Aware of her destination, he arrived next day to claim her, but she absolutely refused to go with him. Early in April he returned, pouring forth threats of vengeance and legal proceedings against the Community. Many a superior would have considered the postulant a menace to the peace and security of the entire body and would have counseled her to leave at least for a time. But not so Mother Theodore. The Community was terrified. "At every moment we imagine we can see the Know-Nothings coming to set fire to our house," noted the Foundress in the diary.²¹ It was Holy Week and they had recourse to their usual refuge, prayer, and after giving them a share in His cross, their good God came to their aid. "On Holy Saturday," concludes the diary, "the old man went away." Sister Julia, innocent cause of so much anxiety and uneasiness, became a devout and faithful Sister of Providence. As a novice she was named assistant to the infirmarian, Sister Olympiade, and in that capacity had the privilege of helping to care for her saintly Mistress of Novices in her last illness and later testified in the process for Mother Theodore's beatification. She spent sixty-three years in the sublime and meritorious labor of teaching to little children the knowledge and love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, dying at the motherhouse, March 26, 1918.

Mother Theodore was now beginning the last year of her life. In another year she would have left them. Did the Community realize it? To some extent they did, those especially who saw her growing weaker, more suffering from month to month, yet struggling with her old devotedness to fulfill her duties to the very last. She suffered greatly all winter from the cold, much more than ever before, but she went to Evansville and Vincennes in January, seeing the Sisters in both places and conferring with Monseigneur, who was considering a procedure carried on at Highland many years later of amalgamating the two orphan asylums at Saint Vincent's, the old Saint Gabriel's College building. She returned on January 27 during a snowy week of piercing cold. So few of the villagers came out on the following Sunday that Father Corbe officiated at Vespers and Benediction in the convent chapel. A brood of little chickens came out during this severe weather which continued till early in March. Almost everyone, Sisters and pupils, had heavy colds. During the novena in preparation for the feast of St. Joseph, Mother Theodore was stricken with pneumonia. The attack was not severe and in a week or so she was better, but her malady left her weak and suffering.

I feel that I am becoming much weaker, she wrote to France. Since last June I have had a cough that gives me no respite, never leaves me. I have just had an attack of inflammation of the lungs which has weakened them still more, and further my voice is gone. . . . If God wishes me to die, I am resigned though it would cost me much to leave our Sisters in this moment of peril. . . . The Know Nothings, an abominable secret society, spread as a cloud of malediction all over America, threaten to destroy the Catholic religion throughout the country. . . . The winter here this year has been overpowering in rigor and duration. Today, the first day of spring, there is hard ice everywhere though the weather is bright.²²

²¹ April, 1855.

²² A ma Sœur Marie Anne, 21 mars, 1855. S.M.W.A.

At the end of the month she had an attack of fever which passed off in response to her bleeding herself, but returned. She had a relapse on Holy Thursday and grew better only after April 20. In February she sent out all the bills for the academy at the opening of the semester, then a number of prospectuses followed by important letters.

Up to that time she had written sixty letters to Sisters alone over and above a number of business letters. The correspondence concerning the mission at Thibodaux, Louisiana, required her attention although after she had consulted the councilors by a circular letter at the end of January, all thought of establishing a house so far away was definitely given up. Bishop Martin's renewed requests for a colony of Sisters of Providence for Alexandria, Louisiana, were also eventually declined. Bishop de Saint-Palais's explicit opposition to any expansion beyond the diocese of Vincennes was only one reason. Father Gleizal's advice in the matter was conclusive. He counseled Mother Theodore to conform to the Bishop's wishes and to extend the Community's field of labor very slowly lest it suffer as other Sisterhoods had done in New York and Cincinnati.

A young novice from Jasper, Sister Mary James, was now on mission at Vincennes. Mother Theodore had taken a deep interest in her, and like Sister Maurice she had spent several years at the academy completing her education as a postulant. Eventually she became an accomplished music teacher and an austere and saintly religious. She possessed at her entrance some real estate in the state of Ohio which was being disposed of for taxes. At the price of great trouble and considerable correspondence, Mother Theodore obtained possession of this property for this young Sister who was still a novice. There was some correspondence also connected with the Terre Haute and Alton Railroad and during these early weeks in the new year her customary letters to France and to Madame Parmentier and other regular correspondents. "I am truly tired," she wrote to Sister Basilide, "but I shall rest, I feel, only in heaven."²⁸

Early in May Monseigneur arrived at Saint Mary's on his way to Cincinnati for the Provincial Council where he intended proposing the division of his diocese with a new episcopal see at Fort Wayne. During his visit Mother Theodore noted in the diary, "I am very ill." He advised her, however, to go to Madison for the annual visitation especially as she was extremely anxious to do so, and she started on May 3 accompanied by Sister Mary Joseph. This trip, destined to be her last, was a veritable martyrdom though she made every effort to maintain her usual gay serenity. Since her attack in March her chest was much worse, and talking fatigued her and brought on her cough. When they had arrived there on Saturday night, May 6, at nine o'clock, Sister Mary Joseph found courage to write to Sister Saint Francis Xavier as Mother seemed better, had some color, and coughed much less. She slept fairly well and next day, Sunday, was not too wearied. Father DuPontavice came to the convent for Holy Communion and sent his carriage to take Mother Theodore to Sunday High Mass and Vespers. He had hoped to find a text for his sermon, he said, in Sister Saint Francis's last letter, but said Elvire, "He needs no suggestion, I think, to speak well." Of the Foundress she wrote:

²⁸ *J. and L.*, p. 397.

I hope that . . . her trip will do her good rather than harm. I would have written a few words to dear Sister Olympiade from Terre Haute if Mother had been better there but she was so pale that I had no courage to write. Tell Sister that I will take good care of Mother and will try to follow her instructions, though I count more upon the offering of her actions she is going to make for our dear traveler than upon any remedy.²⁴

They had spent five hours in Indianapolis en route where "Monseigneur met us and accompanied us to the residence of Madame Macannon [McKernan] where we dined."²⁵ On Sunday they had dinner with the North Madison Sisters [Sister Martina, Sister Saint John and Sister Agatha] who came down the hill. One can easily imagine with what pleasure Sister Basilide and her four Sisters²⁶ did the honors to their beloved Mother seated at the head of the table, pale and wan and choking back her cough with a great effort, but still their loving, cherished, and incomparable Mother. Her stay was brief. The French Sisters were usually terrified at the trip on the inclined plane over the mountain north of Madison. "Father Corbe's blessing brought us good fortune," wrote Sister Mary Joseph, "for I was not frightened coming down the mountain. I moved nearer to Mother that we might die together if we fell."²⁷ "My health is better," Mother Theodore wrote from Indianapolis where she and her companion spent the night at the Palmer House maintained by their friend, Mr. Nathan Palmer, whose daughter was a pupil at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. "I still cough; however, I have seen two doctors. You will hear later what fine discoveries they have made."²⁸ The two Sisters had reached Indianapolis at eleven P.M., and the next night they went on to Fort Wayne.

One of the great sources of suffering during these journeys was the impossibility of obtaining something the Foundress could eat in the inns where they had to stop, and on the canal and steamboats. In the homes of friends, the Benbridges in Lafayette, the Durets in Logansport, the Gwins in Columbus, and with Mrs. Farrell in New Albany, she could sometimes be served the light food which was all she could ever take. Often, however, she had to sit down to a *table d'hôte* dinner of hot bread, fried and boiled vegetables, and heavy meats and puddings, not one single item of which she could even taste. *A la carte* service, though found in the Prairie House in Terre Haute, as we have seen, and in other good hotels, was not by any means general, and the Foundress's tours were almost all made in a day after day complete fast. Mother Cecilia tells that once in a canal boat at supper they sat down to a table of heavy and substantial food. A piece of bread was all Mother Theodore could take, and she asked for some milk which proved to be, not the milk Mother Theodore needed, but some sort of concoction for which Mother Cecilia could find but one word, *filthy*. "It is nothing," was her response to her companion's expressions of regret.²⁹

²⁴ A ma Sœur Saint Francis Xavier, 6 mai, 1855. S.M.W.A.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Sister Maria, Sister Louise, Sister Bonaventure, and Sister Mary Angele.

²⁷ A ma Sœur Saint Francis, 6 mai, 1855. S.M.W.A.

²⁸ A ma Sœur Saint Francis Xavier, 16 mai, 1855.

²⁹ Mother Cecilia's MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 90.

Mother Theodore's usual careful inquiry into the progress and the needs of schools and Sisters marked this trip despite her increasing weakness. She was examining as usual, putting aside as she always did any thought of self when duty was in question. The children who saw her on this last visit to Fort Wayne remembered years later the dark-eyed Sister who examined their classes always attended by two other Sisters, probably Sister Mary Joseph and the local superior, Sister Saint Vincent.³⁰ She had, however, reached her limit. The long trip from Madison must have completely exhausted her and she fainted away in a classroom while questioning a child on the catechism. Father Benoit and the Sisters were grieved and alarmed to see her so weak and suffering. She had to give up, and after two weeks in bed, the two Sisters started for home by a long three hundred mile trip on the railroad, traveling east into Ohio to make connections with the Indianapolis line thus avoiding the days of exposure of the canal trip.

Mother Cecilia in her manuscript life of the Foundress gives a resumé of this last trip:

When spring came, she gathered up her strength and started to visit the missions. The hope that traveling might benefit her was more the reason than any obligation to go, for the bad state of her health sufficiently dispensed her from it as a point of duty. The trip did not do her any good, and she came home somewhat worse than when she had left. She was so long ailing at the last place she visited that she could not return by the same way she had come. She could not stand the hard and tedious travel . . . sometimes by canal, by stage, or by steamboat. At that time these were the modes of traveling which connected with one another to form the line of road from Terre Haute to the upper parts of the state. As yet there were no railroads in that portion of the Wabash valley. To avail herself of the easier and speedier way of conveyance by the cars, she had in Ohio to make connection with a train coming to central Indiana. By this route, though circuitous and farther, she got home in a shorter time and with less fatigue. This was her last visit to the establishments.³¹

The two doctors she had consulted during her absence were Dr. Baty in Vincennes and Father Louis Neyron, pastor of New Albany, who like Bishop Bruté had been a doctor of medicine before entering the priesthood and was said to have been in Marshal Ney's army when that leader surrendered to Napoleon on his return from Elba. The former physician diagnosed the cough as bronchial, though Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote to Mother Mary in June that for ten months the Foundress had been expectorating blood. "I reassure myself," she continued, "thinking Our Lord will let her live, as He has cured her so many times. My hope is not in remedies and physicians, but in Him."³² Sister Saint Francis Xavier herself was hardly any better. "We are both worth two coppers, not even a sou,"³³ wrote the Foundress in March, and earlier she had said with her usual gaiety, "When Sister Saint Francis has been pretty well one day, she spends three in repentance for this good action. She is truly incorrigible."³⁴ Thus did these noble-hearted women, the foundresses of

³⁰ Reminiscences of Mrs. Mary Killian Logan, Sister Eugenia's mother.

³¹ Mother Cecilia's MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 69.

³² A Mère Marie, 2 juin, 1855. S.M.W.A.

³³ A ma Sœur Basilide, 22 mars, 1855. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 février, 1855. S.M.W.A.

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, make light of their real and heavy cross of physical suffering.

On May 30 when Mother Theodore finally reached Saint Mary's, she was completely exhausted. She was not now physically able for the long, hard journeys on the cold, slow canal boats, the stages over dreadful roads and the interminable delays and inconvenient hours of the steamboat and rail transportation of the times. That this might be "the last of all illnesses from which I shall not recover" does not seem to have occurred to the Sisters, not even as yet to Sister Saint Francis Xavier or to Sister Olympiade, nor even, apparently, to the Foundress herself. She had returned from the brink of the grave so many times, so many times the Immaculate Virgin had saved her that her present indisposition excited sorrow and concern but hardly the alarm one would have expected. One single fact, however, that Sister Saint Francis dated the Foundress's deep-seated and incurable cough from August, 1854, should have shown how serious was her condition.

For the accounts and correspondence she was still able, and she kept them up faithfully till the end at the price, no doubt at times, of heroic sacrifice. After her attack of March, 1855, Sister Saint Francis wrote to Sister Basilide that Mother could not lean over her desk because of the sharp pain in her chest. This intermittent pain caused her much suffering, but as soon as it passed away, she was at work again. After this last tour, the careful statistics which she ordinarily recorded after her visitation each year, data on the enrollment and success of the schools, the health and well-being of the Sisters, are missing. She had had ample proof, however, that the combined effect of the Know-Nothing agitation and the public school movement had been materially to diminish the enrollment in the schools, especially among the Protestant pupils. Mother Theodore attributed this especially to the influence of the Know-Nothings:

They have succeeded in breaking up several of our Protestant classes and have even begun to lower in a very noticeable degree our Catholic attendance by refusing work to Catholics and not permitting them to hold any position. They thus compel them to leave this ungrateful part of the country and go to seek among the Indians of the Rocky Mountains a liberty refused them here, where they cannot even have a living. Pray for us that we may be faithful unto the end. . . . If the good God does not work a miracle to deliver us . . . in a short time there will be a bloody persecution in America.³⁵

During her absence the Community had celebrated a solemn triduum of thanksgiving for the privilege of the Immaculate Conception, closing on May 26 with a procession. A beautiful banner made for the occasion was carried by one of the Sisters, and the Community and all the villagers assisted with great devotion. "O Mary," added the Foundress to her account in the diary, "protect thy children of the Woods. They owe so much to thee. Everything." A few days later, early in June, Monseigneur came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as he so often did on his continual journeys up and down the diocese, and he advised her to make a special trip to Vincennes to place herself under Dr. Baty's care and remain as long as would be necessary. His prescriptions proved too strong for her

³⁵ A ma Sœur Marie-Anne, 21 mars, 1855. S.M.W.A.

poor digestion, and she returned much weakened on July 2. A novena by the Community and the children in honor of the Immaculate Conception with daily Masses celebrated by Father Chassé brought her some amelioration. She poured forth her heart in a long letter to Mother Mary early in July describing her painful state of health:

This year God has given me a share in His cross; but I ought to tell you, dear Mother, that I have never borne it so badly. To my ordinary ailments there has been added an affection of the chest which, for more than a year has caused me to suffer much and since the first of March has not left me a moment's repose. Notwithstanding this bad state of health, I wished to visit the establishments, but that was impossible. Arrived at Fort Wayne in the month of May, I was two weeks in bed and scarce able to do a thing. Returning to St. Mary's in much pain, though traveling by railroad, I have continued to be very sick.

Three weeks ago, our superior ordered me to Vincennes, to consult a French doctor who has been there a long time. Hardly had I arrived in that city when, in consequence of a remedy he had me take, which was too strong, I was seized with a dysentery that lasted fifteen days and ended by taking away the little strength I had before. I could scarcely bear the movement of the cars in coming home four days ago, although the journey took only two hours and a half. For the last two days I feel a little stronger. I am profiting by this slight improvement to have a little chat with you, which is a great pleasure for me, you must not doubt.

Not only has the doctor forbidden me any kind of work, but I myself feel that it is impossible to do anything. There are a dozen Sisters at Vincennes, and I could not even speak privately to each of them; so our establishments are left without being visited.

In a month we have the retreat, and even in a few days several of the Sisters whose schools are already closed will be here. I shall not be of any service whatever to them as it is impossible for me to talk five minutes without choking and being obliged to be silent.³⁶

Mother Mary, too, had been upon the cross during this year. She had lost her faithful secretary, Sister Marie Ludovic, as we have seen, and later her niece, Sister Elisa, a gifted and promising young religious. Now the mistress of novices at Ruillé, Sister Eudoxie, was threatened with blindness and lost the sight of one eye; and the beloved First Assistant Mother Saint-Charles had been ill for a long time. "Truly," wrote Mother Theodore, "God afflicts those whom He loves. He causes them to travel the way that He Himself marked with His Blood. But what a reward He Himself has laid up for them,"³⁷ words which were to be exemplified from now on in her own career.

I feel, she added, that in the state to which I am reduced, if I am ever cured it will be due to the fervent prayers that are being offered for me beseeching this favor through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin. . . . The doctor at Vincennes said contrary to two others consulted before him, that my lungs are not attacked. He says I have a chronic inflammation of the bronchials, a heart affection, and inflammation of the peritoneum, and with all this one can drag along for a good while and even be cured. . . . Pardon me for talking so long about myself. . . . I am calm and resigned awaiting in peace the accomplishment of the will of God in my regard.³⁸

³⁶ A Mère Marie, 7 juillet, 1855. S.M.W.A.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

To no one else did she speak with the same candor, and her forecast proved to be correct for she was destined to live nearly a year longer and to endure once more the rigorous Indiana winter which caused her so much suffering. Despite her weakness and her almost continual cough, the Foundress continued her usual careful supervision of the farm and the government of the Community. The crops were of excellent quality and very abundant. There were good quantities of vegetables in the garden, and the richly laden fruit trees promised an excellent supply of fruit for the winter. Mother Theodore was now sending out bills and reports for the second semester as the close of the academy was due in another week. She noted, as usual, the amount involved in the tuition bills, \$7,246, and the good standing of the school as evinced in the pupils' reports.

Her last circular inviting the Sisters to the retreat, written in English and dated July 5, ends with the characteristic words, "Come as soon as possible to give me the consolation to see you all fervent and closely united which is the greatest pleasure I can have in this world."³⁹ She wrote the original herself, and the other Sisters made copies, one for each mission which she signed. The rare copies preserved are often minus this souvenir of their mother, cut off by one of her daughters. Several of the mission Sisters were already at home, and on July 21, Dr. Read came to conduct the public examination. He also delivered an address at the *distribution des prix*, commending the institution. Others were delivered by his brother and Mr. W. R. McKeen, a Terre Haute editor. Cars chartered specially for the occasion brought the numerous assembly in the morning and returned for them in the evening. "Our pupils conducted themselves well and deserved the approbation of all," was the Foundress's final comment.⁴⁰

Almost all the missionary Sisters were now at home. Several were accompanied by postulants, of whom there were now twenty-four. By August 4 everything was in readiness for the retreat, only six Sisters unavoidably detained on the missions, two at Saint Augustine's, Fort Wayne, and four with the orphans at Vincennes. Father Gleizal had advised Mother Theodore to apply early in the spring to the Jesuit Provincial in Saint Louis for a retreat master, and the Community was thus privileged again to have one of the zealous Fathers of the Missouri province, this time Father Isidore Boudreaux, one of the first native Americans to enter in 1836 among the Western Jesuits. He was a Creole from Louisiana and in 1855 at thirty-eight had been for two years the rector of Saint Xavier's College in Cincinnati.⁴¹ Garraghan describes him as devout and efficient, "a man of prayer" and of that "engaging mildness that wins confidence and inspires affection." Two years later he was appointed master of novices at Florissant where he could often be seen one, two, and three hours at a time kneeling in the novitiate chapel "a radiant smile playing over his spiritualized features."⁴² He held this important post for twenty-three years (1857-1880). The Community was fortunate indeed to have this deeply spiritual and prayerful man. They had hoped to have Father

³⁹ Printed in full, *J. and L.*, p. 404.

⁴⁰ Community Diary.

⁴¹ Garraghan, *Jesuits of the Middle U. S.*, vol. 3, p. 193.

⁴² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 596.

Gleizal a second time, but he assured Mother Theodore that they were being well served. They had preached a very successful mission together in the Milwaukee Cathedral in August, 1853.

Father Gleizal had advised Mother Theodore to allow nothing to prevent the opening of the exercises on the sixth in order to have the full eight days. Monseigneur always wished to be present, however. He loved the Jesuits and enjoyed their society, and this year a retreat at Vincennes for the priests of the diocese was to follow immediately after the feast of the Assumption. Father Boudreaux arrived promptly from Saint Louis on August 6, but the exercises began only on the evening of the seventh. All the Sisters were well and able to be present. The Foundress alone was condemned to solitude and inactivity. "O my God, grant that I may be a victim for all my dear daughters," she wrote in the diary, "since I am the only one deprived of the happiness of making the retreat. Oh, have pity on them and on me."

She was no better. In fact, as she acknowledged herself, she was very much worse. Late in July Dr. Baty came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods with Mrs. Baty and his niece and condemned the Foundress to absolute rest. She had then on the feast day, July 26, turned to Saint Anne as she had done with so much confidence during the terrible days on the winter Atlantic in 1843, and promised a pilgrimage to the famous Breton shrine of Sainte Anne d'Auray. She wrote herself to her sister Mme. Jeanne Le Touzé at Etables and to Mme. Le Fer at Saint-Servan asking them to make the pilgrimage for her and in her stead. It was now too late for them to join the national pilgrimages which converged upon the famous shrine on July 26, entire parishes from all over Brittany with cross bearer and choir boys in surplices, parishioners singing with their Curé and Vicaire, all to assist at the Curé's Mass at the shrine followed by a Mass of thanksgiving by the Vicaire and a day of devotion ending only in the evening. The shrine was a place of devotion all through the year and especially in the summer months, and the pilgrimage for Mother Theodore could thus be made later without inconvenience. The pilgrimages were duly made with the deepest devotion. To Mme. Le Touzé especially, grief-stricken at the loss of her son Jean Marie, Mother Theodore's nephew and Sister Mary Theodore's brother, who had been drowned in the Atlantic a short time before on the way home from Newfoundland, the day of devotion was a source of great consolation. Her son, only eighteen years of age had fallen from the mast on his ship, and his body was never recovered. They had no uneasiness as to the state of his soul as he had received the sacraments before embarking, but his poor mother was inconsolable for many months.

At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods the retreat progressed with the utmost fervor and closed on August 15 with the usual renovation of vows by the professed Sisters and the ceremonies of profession and reception. Six postulants received the religious habit⁴³ and eleven novices were professed.⁴⁴

⁴³ Sister Eugenia, Sister Clementine, who was Sister Josephine's younger sister, Sister Mary Ursula, Sister Boniface, Sister Rosalie, and Sister Bridget.

⁴⁴ Sister Mary James, Sister Mary Pauline, Sister Saint Paul, Sister Ann Joseph, Sister Mary Eudoxie, Sister Saint Felix, Sister Mary Joseph, Sister Melanie, Sister Ophidia, Sister Veronica, and Sister Juliana.

Sister Mary Joseph gives a description of the chapel on her profession day:

Mme. Leseure⁴⁵ had made a beautiful diadem of pearls and silver for Bertaudière's Madonna and the tall flowering camellias reached to the height of her hands. Our exposition was new and adorned with the pretty leaves from France, and the golden rays of our lovely monstrance shone in the candlelight. Our chapel was charming. Mother Theodore at the price of incredible exertion and much suffering dragged herself to the chapel door, but she could not stay.⁴⁶

Monseigneur officiated as usual, assisted by Father Corbe and the retreat master Father Boudreaux. For the first time Mother Theodore was absent. On the afternoon of August 14 she was attacked by malaria suddenly, and the first terrible crisis of the fever reduced her in a very short time, as she herself said, to an almost hopeless state. Sister Mary Cecilia replaced her at the ceremonies next day, and when Monseigneur and the Jesuit Father left on August 16, she was still in an almost dying condition. The Vincennes and Jasper Sisters left the same day, distressed not to be able to see her, and on the eighteenth Father Corbe heard her confession and gave her Holy Viaticum before leaving for the ecclesiastical retreat at Vincennes.

On the nineteenth she was a little better, and a week later she was in somewhat the same state as before her attack of fever "with additional weakness, however, and greatly attenuated." ⁴⁷ Her vigorous Breton physique was gradually but surely breaking down, though her resignation and courage helped her to make the best of every slight amelioration in her condition. Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote on August 22 to Bishop Martin in Louisiana the anxieties of this never-to-be-forgotten vacation:

In our poor exile, days of joy are more often anticipated than realized. We had hoped this summer to enjoy a little of our Mother whose health all winter had been so bad that she scarcely left her room. Well, Father, this summer she is worse than ever. She started out to visit the missions and fell sick again at Fort Wayne. Since the month of May, Mother Theodore is merely living. Doctor Baty says the heart is failing. . . . I have firm confidence that God will leave her to us. I do not ask that she may be as strong and active as formerly—oh, no! May He only leave her to us! Only leave her! Dear Father, pray for us, pray for her—as you love us! All our establishments could not be visited this year. My own health is also very miserable. We are truly badly off.

Most of our dear Sisters were here for the retreat. They came and went, at least the majority, without getting to say a word to Mother. How they wept in bidding us farewell! But they will see her again—yes, I hope. The 15th of August, hitherto such a beautiful day for us, beautiful, too, for our companions in heaven, was a day of tears. For the first time, Mother could not be present at the reception. And while her daughters were pronouncing their vows, she was upon her couch. You can imagine how grieved we were. Saturday morning, Father Corbe took Holy Communion to Mother as Viaticum. The day was one of those days of which Jesus gives us example in the Garden of Olives—hours of agony and sacrifice, hours in which the soul pours itself out like bitter waters before the Lord.

⁴⁵ Francis Eugene Leseure was a native of Nancy, France, who came to Terre Haute in 1850 and maintained a store there and in Paris for some years. Their son Emmanuel was born on Christmas Day, 1853, at St. Mary's and Sister Olympiade named him. Their daughter Mary married Hubert Guthneck, and a son Henry married Louis Alvey's daughter. (Saint Joseph's Church Record.)

⁴⁶ A sa mère, 18 août, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁷ Community Diary.

Those hours, however, passed. Today Mother is somewhat better; so I have come to talk with you a while, to rest myself a little. I hardly know what I am saying but—no matter.

Elvire, my little sister [Sister Mary Joseph] has taken her vows. And she is truly my sister, as to loving Mother Theodore and all the Community. Juliette, Thomas Monaghan's sister, received the Habit. She was given the black veil that had been worn by our beloved Sister Josephine who, last May, exchanged her robes as a Sister of Providence for those of immortality. What a pure soul she was! . . . I wept over her as I can weep. Father Corbe on this occasion was truly a father to me, as he has been on so many other occasions. I feared he would never be able to finish the prayers at her burial. Father Corbe and Mother Theodore—may God be blest for having created them! May He be a thousand times blest for having given them to us! And may He be entreated by all our friends to preserve them to us!⁴⁸

The Community was now being warned from all quarters to spare, to help, and at all costs to conserve their suffering Mother. "Father Benoit who saw her in Fort Wayne," wrote Sister Saint Francis Xavier to Bishop Martin, "says that it is only by a miracle that we shall save her. Do you think I hope for this miracle?" she added. "I certainly do."⁴⁹ "Gardez-la bien, gardez-la bien,"⁵⁰ wrote Abbé Collet, Sister Mary Joseph's confessor from Saint-Servan,⁵¹ and Father Gleizal had already noticed a year earlier how little effort was made to spare her and preserve her already failing strength. He advised a general retrenchment in her duties, especially in the vocal prayers which she still said alternating with the Community.

If I were in Father Corbe's place, he wrote, I would forbid her doing the least thing in the way of work. I would consider before God what is above her strength and put a veto upon it. During my little sojourn at St. Mary's, I remarked that she could have had done by others many things she took upon herself to do; for example, another Sister could say the public prayers, many letters could be written by others, some only absolutely requiring her attention, etc. Be sure that a diminishing of work of this nature would do her much good.⁵²

Sister Saint Francis Xavier because of her habit of close communing with God could never restrain her devotion within the confines of ordered Community prayers and was therefore unable spiritually to relieve Mother Theodore even if physically she had been able to do so. Things went on therefore much as before. We have seen, too, that the Foundress sent out all the bills and reports for the academy in July, 1855, at a time when she was suffering greatly, was unable to speak to the Sisters, and had acknowledged repeatedly in her letters to France her utter inability from increasing weakness to cope with her heavy duties. Mother Mary, largely with the help of Mother Saint Charles and Sister Eudoxie only, though she had a secretary and an econome, was still governing a more numerous Community, but she had never had the dreadful hardships, physical and moral, which had broken Mother Theodore's constitution. No attention came from France therefore to her requests for aid, and inexplicably nothing was

⁴⁸ *Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 454.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Watch over her carefully.

⁵¹ 11 novembre, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁵² A Sœur Saint Francis Xavier, 18 septembre, 1855. S.M.W.A.

done at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. She had always been their valiant Mother, who had borne their burdens and carried their sorrows, and she was destined to do so to the end.

In some pathetic lines to Mother Mary, penned after most of the Sisters had left Saint Mary's, she details her condition, a prey in her weakened state to the various Indiana fevers and epidemics.

I neither die nor live. One week I am a little better and the next I relapse. . . . Finally, by dint of one relapse after another I am reduced to nothing. I cannot stand up, and I am absolutely incapable of any work. The Sisters came to the Retreat and are leaving today for their missions without my being able to say a word to them although they have been here six weeks. The feast of the Assumption, the day on which the Retreat closed, and the day that eleven novices took their vows and six postulants received the habit, it was absolutely impossible for me to assist in any way, and three days later I received Holy Viaticum. You can see now, dear Mother, that our Lord wished to make me see the truth of what you told me—that I was very proud and foolish to think that my Sisters still had need of me, as everything passed off perfectly without my having a hand in it at all. I do not doubt but it will be the same when I shall have closed my eyes. I have said so to myself many times, but I did not know it so clearly as after the experience I had and after receiving your good letter for which I thank you most heartily. It is not through mere politeness I say this, but because it has done me a real good.

A pilgrimage to Ste. Anne d'Auray was promised for me, and since then I am a little better . . . but my chest is always very bad and for several days past my cough is worse. I am fully convinced that it is only by nothing less than a miracle that I shall see the end of the winter. I am resigned to the holy will of God; in fact, I feel even nearer to Him since I am continually on the cross. This long agony is a favor of which I was not worthy. Thank God for me, I pray you, for this favor and ask for your old daughter the grace of a happy death.⁶³

Father Corbe had returned from the retreat for the clergy at Vincennes, and two days later the saintly Belgian retreat master, Father Charles Van den Driessche, S.J., generally known as Father Driscoll, came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for a visit. This truly apostolic man spent thirty-six years as pastor of Saint Xavier's Church, Cincinnati, making the parish a fervent center of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.⁶⁴ He went away a few days later, and on September 4, Sister Mary Cecilia left accompanying the three foundresses, Sister Saint Charles, Sister Mary Pauline, and Sister Mary Ursula to open the new mission in Columbus, Indiana. The travelers probably spent the night at Saint Vincent's in Terre Haute in order to take the early train to Indianapolis. There after a wait of some hours they could board a train for Columbus on the Madison Railroad. The transportation was the best afforded at that time anywhere in the West. Columbus was a small but flourishing town in Bartholomew County on the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad, well known to the Sisters who had been stopping there for years on the way to Madison, entertained by Mrs. Gwin, whose daughter Mary was a pupil at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Mother Theodore had intended opening a mission this year in Indianapolis, but preparations were not complete. Monseigneur wished it to begin on a large scale as it was their first mission in

⁶³ 30 août, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁴ Garraghan, *Jesuits of the Middle U. S.*, vol. 3, p. 546.

the capital. Mother Theodore had met the Croatian pastor of Columbus, Father Edward Martinovic, or Father Martin as he was usually called, the previous spring, and he had come to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at the end of July to conclude the arrangements for his school and to ascertain the conditions. Mass at least three times a week, a house and school at the expense of the parish, not too far from the church, were specified by the Particular Council, and he promised a tuition fee of a dollar per month from the Catholic pupils. Mother Theodore was unable, owing to the distressing cough which now gave her so much suffering, to give the three young Sisters one of her inspiring talks on the beauty and merit of their mission of teaching the little children of Indiana to know and love Our Lord Jesus Christ. She was now a little better, however, and exerted every effort to say a few words to communicate to their docile and eager hearts some sparks of her own burning zeal. They were all young Sisters, two of them novices, and had just finished Father Boudreaux's excellent retreat. They set out, therefore, for their mission with high courage.

Columbus on the Driftwood, fork of the White River, midway between Greensburg and Bloomington, lies in a low, malarial, swampy region of the type denominated by one of the early surveyors as a "brushy slough," near the point of the wedge where the Ten o'Clock Line ends at Brownstown. Not open to white settlement till the New Purchase was concluded by the treaty of 1818, it was first preempted by General John Tipton of Tippecanoe fame and several others in 1820. Three brothers, the Mahoneys, and their sister Mrs. Basil Owens, Catholic Marylanders from Kentucky, came into the region almost immediately and were served intermittently by Father Lalumiere from Washington and Father Shawe from Madison. John M. Gwinn and a number of other Catholic Kentuckians and Irish had found homes in this vicinity by 1840, and Father Vincent Bacquelin from Saint Vincent's near Prescott in Shelby County had attended them regularly since 1837.

From that time on Columbus was never without regular church services. In 1841 Father Bacquelin built the church dedicated to Saint Bartholomew. After his tragic death in 1846 Father Daniel Molony was pastor till 1853, when the generous, zealous, self-sacrificing priest so often called "Good Father Martin," succeeded him, serving also the Catholics of eight or ten scattered localities in the same district.⁶⁵ Bishop de Saint-Palais had visited Columbus on his episcopal tour in the fall of 1849, the first Bishop ever seen by the Catholics there. In 1850 the parish counted only thirty families. The school was then sure to be small, and when the classes opened on September 8, forty children, girls and boys, was the number enrolled, taught separately as custom required. Sister Mary Cecilia was disappointed to find that the rented house, which Father Martinovic had prepared for use as convent and school, was situated at a great distance from the church. When she returned to Saint Mary's, Mother Theodore wrote asking the pastor to try to remedy this condition, and he succeeded in finding another house across from the church. Much good was accomplished by the little mission, which has been given up and

⁶⁵ Alerding, *History of the Vincennes Diocese*, p. 364.

resumed several times in its history. This first school lasted till the opening of the Civil War.

In September, 1855, the Foundress grew a little better. She attributed her improvement to the intercession of her great patron Saint Anne. She kept up her correspondence, directed the general government of the house, wrote almost daily in the diary, and gave her five o'clock "Catechism" on the Rule without fail. The Sisters had been painting the porches and what the men had left unfinished of the fences. Their Mother's well known vigilance never relaxed a minute over every interest of the Community, spiritual especially but temporal also.

Other plans, too, consonant with her large-minded outlook for the future were taking form in her fertile mind. Just at this time comes the first intimation of her desire to put into execution her long cherished project to build an adequate and suitable chapel in honor of the Blessed Virgin. On the eve of her Nativity, the Foundress set down her plan to begin to gather the materials, to arrange to burn the brick and quarry the stone. What an untold happiness for her if, before she died, she could erect in their forest a fitting beautiful monument, the token of a life's gratitude to Mary conceived without sin! She consulted Monseigneur about her project almost as soon as it had taken definite form in her mind. He expressed his pleasure in the longest letter from his pen in the archives of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods:

I can learn only with pleasure of your plan to build a chapel at Saint Mary's and enlarge your Academy. Yours, however, is the task to measure your strength and see whether it is equal to the enterprise. When you began to build your mother-house you were poor. It is finished now, however, and I do not think that your debt can be considerable. We must hope then that with the aid of God and the Blessed Virgin you will accomplish your project without difficulty and that while raising a beautiful external temple to Mary, the interior shrine will also be embellished. Sometimes when exterior edifices grow larger, the interior diminish proportionately. I feel sure, however, that the daughters of Providence will remain humble amid their beautiful surroundings and will always cultivate with care the spirit of poverty which is the glory of religious communities and assures their success.⁵⁶

The project was in no sense a rash undertaking. Although they had been occupying the new motherhouse now only two years, it was finished within and without and practically already paid for. "Nearly all our debts are paid," Mother Theodore had written to Mother Mary in August.⁵⁷ "This is a great satisfaction for me." She already had in her possession also the nucleus of the building fund, a sum of several thousand dollars, a gift from a Sister's dowry. In the same letter to France quoted above, the Foundress requests from the French superior general a copy of the plan of the church then going up at Ruillé, the present handsome Gothic edifice still standing, of which the cornerstone was laid September 8, 1855, by the Abbé Chevereau, vicar general of the diocese of Le Mans.

This beloved project was now hardly ever out of Mother Theodore's mind. On September 25, Dr. Baty came to Saint Mary's and found her chest better than it had been in August. "It is in fact better since my

⁵⁶ 24 octobre, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁷ Août, 1855. S.M.W.A.

sister made the journey to Sainte Anne d'Auray for me. Gloire à Ste. Anne," she wrote in the diary.⁵⁸ On October 22, an anniversary fraught with so many memories, she signed the contract for burning the brick "for the chapel which we propose to build in honor of our Blessed Mother. Today, fifteen years ago, she brought us to our woods and has ever since protected us. What joy to erect a monument to her!" Then follows one of the characteristic practical touches which made of her the model administrator and financier which she was, "Brick at \$3.50 per thousand." Earlier in the month she had arranged for the brickmaker and his family to take up residence at the farmhouse, and the workmen began at once to haul the wood for burning the brick.⁵⁹

Not much could now be done, however, till spring, especially as the Wabash was out of its banks for the first time at this usually arid autumn season since 1840 when the first little band of Sisters had been so frightened by the dangers of the road across the flooded river bottom. Now that the cars on the Terre Haute and Alton Railroad were running regularly over the high railroad bridge across the Wabash, the Community was never again isolated completely as they had been for weeks at a time during the 1840's, but hauling wood and building materials would now necessarily have to be given up during the winter. The project was still receiving her attention however, and in December Mother Theodore was again asking Mother Mary to send them a copy of the architect's plan for the Ruillé church. To the French Sisters, Ruillé was still the acme of perfection, and their dearest hope and desire was to reproduce the beloved French motherhouse in its every detail, spiritual and temporal, at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

They could not command the services of a capable architect in Vigo County in the 1850's, but Mother Theodore was experienced now and could herself direct the good bricklayers and masons and carpenters in Terre Haute, whom she now knew and whose services she could secure. An excellent blue print by a capable architect would, however, be of immense advantage.

All the Sisters of St. Mary's, wrote the Foundress on December 18, especially all those who have had the privilege of knowing you, unite in offering to you their wishes and their homage; also to ask a favor of you, in which all concur, as a New Year's gift, hoping to obtain it as it would be for the glory of our good Blessed Mother. You will not refuse it. It is this. You know, Mother, that we would like to build a chapel. We should have to be our own architect and surveyor. We entreat you then, dear Mother, to send us the plan of your church, or, if you think it would not be suitable in our Woods, would you have the kindness to have one made by the person who made yours or by someone else? We would like it in *Gothic Style*, at least one hundred feet long, width and height in proportion. We could select the most appropriate place for it, as space is not wanting here. There is a Catholic Canadian here, who is getting ready to make the brick in the spring. He can make all kinds of necessary external ornaments. Kindly give your attention to this matter as soon as possible, if you please. As to the expenses, we shall immediately remit the money upon learning what the amount will be. We shall have a little sum in the hands of Mme. Le Fer in a short time.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Community Diary, 25 septembre, 1855.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 octobre, 1855.

⁶⁰ A Mère Marie, 18 décembre, 1855. S.M.W.A.

Early in January the Foundress remarked that "Since we have promised to build a chapel in honor of Mary Immaculate, several old debts have been paid,"⁶¹ and on the nineteenth she engaged ten thousand feet of ash flooring "for our chapel" from John Bodine on the prairie, that is, Paris Prairie, as the North Arm was sometimes called. At the same time she ordered forty cords of wood at \$1.50 per cord from the neighboring farmers, Rice and Smith, to burn the brick. On February 28, 1856, forty-eight cords of this wood were already delivered "to burn the brick for our future chapel." "I am better," she added, thinking perhaps that the longed-for privilege of building a sanctuary to Mary Immaculate might yet be hers, though Sister Saint Francis Xavier distinctly foretold during the ecstatic last hours of her life that her beloved Mother Theodore would soon follow her. This last happiness of erecting a fitting shrine in their forest, dedicated to the Queen of Heaven since 1835 by the sainted Bruté, was not destined, however, to be hers. Mother Theodore's hope was to build a church in honor of the Immaculate Conception. In that she differed from the plans at Ruillé, where the two early chapels and the present church were all successively dedicated to the Holy Family.⁶² How deeply and tenderly the Foundress of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods loved the heavenly patroness of the Congregation of Providence is written in characters of celestial light on every page of her incomparable diary, the mirror of her grateful and loving soul, and to her nothing the Community could offer would be worthy of their "good Mother Mary," through whom every gift had come to them. But the beauty and eminent building qualities of the famous Indiana limestone were hardly known in the 1850's, and the best the Community could have offered then without skilled architects and builders could never have equaled the magnificent white stone structure in "Italian Renaissance style with a French sentiment,"⁶³ which with its graceful lace-like tower is today the jewel of the beautiful campus at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The privilege of erecting this lovely edifice was reserved thirty years later (1886) for another superior general⁶⁴ who was then, in Mother Theodore's last years, a little Methodist girl in Kentucky.

The fall of 1855 was a season of abundance in Vigo County. The unusual yield in the orchards gave large quantities of peaches and apples. Jean Delahaye at the time of his marriage had left the employ of the Community for a time, but the skilled care he had given to the fruit trees was evident in the plentiful amounts, "a surprising quantity" as the Foundress noted in the diary,⁶⁵ which were stored for the winter. Three hundred bushels of potatoes were gathered during October, and early in November seven hundred bushels of corn were cut in splendid weather, warm and sunny enough for an all-day outing to the sand bar at Durkee's Ferry to gather the river shells which were in demand among the Community's friends in France at Saint-Servan and also in Paris. The first frost had come, however, early in October. "Today there is a white frost

⁶¹ 12 janvier, 1856. S.M.W.A.

⁶² Alric, *Congrégation de la Providence*, pp. 11, 33, 53.

⁶³ Statement of the architect, Oscar D. Bohlen, of Indianapolis.

⁶⁴ Mother Euphrasie.

⁶⁵ S.M.W.A.

on our beautiful apple trees still so green. The flowers have lowered their heads and left us."⁶⁶ With this harbinger of winter in the air, the Foundress accepted anew with perfect conformity the real and acute suffering which she experienced each year from the extremes of the American climate. The bottom was still flooded, and one day in October, Father Corbe went to Terre Haute on a hand car, a primitive means of railroad transportation, which often during these years enabled the laborers and others to go to Sunday Mass.

The even recurrence of events continued all during the late autumn. Sister Mary Cecilia went for a few days visit to her aged and infirm mother still residing at the Bailly homestead near Chesterton and destined to live another eleven years, dying in 1866. She sent by her daughter on her return some very useful and curious gifts to the Community: a saddle, a quantity of excellent honey, some wax prepared by herself, and some excellent remedies. Early in October one of the postulants, Margaret Mullen, was taken violently ill and died in four days. Her mother had been sent for at once, but she arrived only a few hours after her daughter was buried in the new convent cemetery. The poor mother had given her daughter to God, and the Community marveled at her faith and piety and complete resignation. During these weeks Mother Theodore penned some of the most valuable and practical of her many letters of spiritual direction to her daughters, the ripe fruit of her deep knowledge of the spiritual life and her own union with God, wise and valuable counsels based upon her intimate knowledge of each one's character and temperament, and treasured at their true worth during all the future lives of the recipients.

Some time also during these weeks Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote one of her characteristic letters to Father Sorin at Notre Dame du Lac. During all the early years the links of the Community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods with the celebrated founder of Notre Dame University were very strong. Their difficulties and sorrows were similar, though Father Sorin's distant location in the northern part of the diocese forced upon him perhaps the procedure of governing almost alone his large and flourishing establishment. He was at Saint Mary's a number of times and also visited the mission schools when he was in their vicinity. Letters of condolence upon the sorrows and of congratulation upon the successes of the two establishments of Notre Dame du Lac and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were also exchanged, and Father Sorin expressed more than once, both *viva voce* and in writing, his deep interest in the daughters of Mother Theodore and their work. "Never forget, my dear Sister, that your house is as dear to me as ours and that I would be glad to give you a new proof of it every day,"⁶⁷ he wrote to Sister Saint Francis in 1843. In 1845 he wrote to Mother Theodore, "You know that your dear house holds in my affection the same rank as ours, and I am ready to give you at any time whatever proofs of it you might desire."⁶⁸

Sister Saint Francis Xavier walked habitually upon the lofty summits of complete detachment, and she often spoke to her friends with the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ 11 mars, 1843. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁸ 30 avril, 1845. S.M.W.A.

candor of the children of God of any fault calculated to keep them from advancing in the spiritual life which she might observe in their conduct. This was her ordinary practice with Mother Theodore, who many years before had asked this service of her and who prized it highly as a humble and saintly person would. Sister Saint Francis wrote often in this slight strain of reproof, half-playful, wholly in earnest, to Father Sorin recalling to him the exalted spiritual ideals he had voiced during their voyage to America on the *Iowa*, when he had said on one occasion that he would view with joy an accident to the vessel which would deprive them of all their baggage that they might go forth into the wilderness like truly apostolic men possessing nothing but Christ and His cross. In her letter of May 10, 1847, however, she thought the Community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had some reason to complain of his conduct if, as they had been told, he had given their name to his Sisters, the name Saint Mary's to his academy, and had dressed his Sisters in the habit of the Sisters of Providence.

Is that true, Father? she wrote. I do not think, my good Father, that you have forgotten the seventh commandment, "The goods of another you shall not take" and still less that you wish to forget the following admonition, "nor keep them without their knowledge."⁶⁹ In time of war one nation may fly the flag of another to avoid a difficulty or to assure a victory, but those are artifices of policy. And our arms in the sacred war which we have undertaken, are those of patience and simplicity. And after all to gain souls to Jesus Crucified, could your Sisters combat under a more beautiful or more trustworthy banner than that of Holy Cross?

I find it hard to believe that my dear Father Sorin, whom on the ocean I have known to be so poor, so disinterested that he allowed even the bread necessary to conserve life to be taken away from him, should have become a robber, and a robber of Community property. I have thus far prayed for your perseverance. If what I have heard is true, I must now pray for your conversion. In the meantime, rest assured, that I shall ask during this beautiful month of May for you and your dear congregation all the graces that I would wish you to ask for ours. I hope that your Sisters will remember us sometimes before God and that they will be sure that we consider them not less our Sisters though differing in name and costume. Jacob and Esau were brothers, though different in physical appearance, but we would be obliged to blame the action of our good Jacob if, before wearing his brother's clothes, he had not first bought his brother's birthright.

The reputation, now becoming state-wide, which Saint Mary's had achieved and because of which the school was now beginning to draw pupils from all over Indiana and even beyond the borders of the state, had been gained at the price of seven years of labor and hardship. Mother Theodore deeply regretted, therefore, that Father Sorin had thought proper to call his recently founded academy by the same name and clothe his Sisters in the livery of Providence. Nevertheless, neither Sister Saint Francis nor her superior were capable of harboring for a moment the least resentment or ill feeling even for a real injury, and the letter closed with words of a sincere charity:

Perhaps I accuse you unjustly. If so tell me, and I will acknowledge that I was wrong to think even for a moment that you had abandoned the path of simplicity

⁶⁹ Bien d'autrui tu ne prendras ni ne retiendras à son escient.

and uprightness. And be assured that I will always be in our Lord, your sincere and devoted Sister under all circumstances and your humble servant.

SR. F. XAVIER⁷⁰

No answer came to this letter, but on April 7, 1848, nearly a year later, Father Sorin wrote in a letter to Mother Theodore, "Nothing has been changed in their [his Sisters'] habit since the terrible accusation of Sister Marie de St. F. X. [sic]." ⁷¹ Circumstances had not changed as late as 1854. In June, 1854, Mother Theodore wrote to Mother Mary, "Mr. Sorin has our name, our prospectus, the name even of our academy. He has named his boarding school St. Mary's Academy just like ours. . . . This good Mr. Sorin is truly a strange person." ⁷²

In his letter of April, 1848, he had announced to Mother Theodore that the Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Cross had asked hospitality of the Sisters of Providence at Saint Augustine's in Fort Wayne for a few weeks for medical care. Accompanied by Sister Assumption, Mother Mary Cenacle had arrived in February, 1848, ⁷³ and was cared for devotedly during many weeks. Far from improving, however, she grew steadily worse, and when Father Sorin spent four days at her bedside in April, she was already dying. She expired holily at Saint Augustine's just a week after Bishop Bazin's demise in Vincennes, April 28, 1848, while Mother Theodore was at Madison on her annual visitation.

During her subsequent stay at Fort Wayne, accompanied by Sister Mary Cecilia and Father Benoit, she acceded to Father Sorin's invitation to visit Notre Dame and especially Bertrand to offer her condolence to the afflicted Sisters who had so recently lost their estimable superior. She remained a week ⁷⁴ and noted with pleasure and surprise the growth of the Communities and the extensive improvements made by Father Sorin. One of the joys of her visit was her meeting with Brother Vincent. She had known him at Ruillé where he had been among the first to enter the Brothers' Community (1821) ⁷⁵ in the pioneer years before the death of Mother du Roscoät. He had been master of novices at Saint Peter's and at the time of Mother Theodore's visit was fully engaged with the pupils at Notre Dame. Faithful as ever to his charge, he did not leave an instant before the assigned time the boys' recreation of which he had surveillance. One of the Sisters, too, who had belonged to Father Dujarié's household at Ruillé was also known to Mother Theodore.

Another friend whom Mother Theodore met again with pleasure at South Bend was the Community benefactor, Mr. Samuel Byerley. Established on his two farms, Saint Philomene and Saint Liguori, he was devoting himself to scientific agriculture. An experienced farmer herself by this time, Mother Theodore admired his elaborate outlay although she observed with regret that his income hardly justified his extensive improvements. She persuaded him, however, to send his daughter Josephine

⁷⁰ Original in N.D.U.A.

⁷¹ S.M.W.A.

⁷² 18 juin, 1854. S.M.W.A.

⁷³ S. Mary Eleanore, *On the King's Highway* (Appleton, N. Y., 1931), p. 153.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁷⁵ A. J. Hope, C.S.C., *Notre Dame—One Hundred Years* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1943), p. 16.

to the Academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, where she and her younger sister Louise were pupils till 1854. The Community record, "Important Events," preserves some notes on Mother Theodore's visit:

Father Sorin gave Mother a pretty statue of the Blessed Virgin and the works of St. Theresa. But he wished to receive in exchange a most precious gift. He had just lost the Superior of his Congregation; the one who replaced her was still a novice. He earnestly begged Mother Theodore to remain some time at South Bend. Seeing his request was useless, he entreated her to give him one of her Sisters to form his little band to the religious life. Later on he renewed his request by letter, but it was not possible for us to comply.

Father Sorin was in fact in great distress to secure a superior for his Community. He would have wished Mother Theodore to take charge indefinitely or at least for a month. As she could not consider this, he cast his eyes upon Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, superior at Madison, to whom he wrote:

You have no doubt heard of the loss we have suffered a few weeks ago in the person of our Mother Superior. Her death has made a vacancy here which I do not yet know how to fill. Mr. Benoit who has been here for several days has given me the hope that you would perhaps consent to come to our help if your Superiors consent. Before receiving your expected response, I will write to your worthy Mother to urge her to give us this alms of which we have such real need in this moment of trial. I will not say that to make up your mind you should look forward to the functions that you may have to fulfill here. I do not wish either to frighten or flatter you by the perspective of titles which I am besides not at liberty exclusively to assign; what I can assure you without hesitation is that you will be in a position here to render yourself very useful and that no matter in what position, I will make it my duty to open to you a field of usefulness greater than you could command where you are. We have at present 26 Sisters and 5 postulants, 3 of whom arrived yesterday. All have more or less need of being formed. In brief, my good Sister, if obedience permits, come to me without pretension and without fear. We will bless God together. Dear Mr. Benoit wishes to write you a few lines himself; I hope he will not turn you from the way of God. Adieu, my good Sister, and believe me to be from this moment what I am in truth.

Votre tout dévoué en J. M. J.

E. SORIN.

N. D. du Lac, Ascension Day, June 1, 1848.⁷⁶

Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, far from being flattered by this appeal, was nonplussed and a little hurt though Father Sorin stated distinctly that he had not consulted Mother Theodore. She sent both letters at once to Mother Theodore with a letter of her own giving the gist of her reply. "I thanked Mr. Sorin," she wrote, "for his generous offer. I assured him that I would never leave Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for any reason whatsoever without your pronounced advice and that of our good Father Corbe; and that, if in your opinion, I would be in a position to do more good by transferring to his house, I told him that I would rather leave Indiana [to return to Ruillé]. I would have sent you a copy of my answer. I do not think it is necessary; these lines contain the substance of it. If you wish, you will see it later. I offered my respects to Mr. Benoit. That is enough, is it not?"⁷⁷ Some time later, Father Benoit communi-

⁷⁶ Original in S.M.W.A.

⁷⁷ S.M.W.A.

cated to Mother Theodore the substance of the correspondence and in particular the contents of Sister Saint Vincent's letter.⁷⁸

During all these years Father Sorin governed his Sisters "almost independently of diocesan or congregational superiors."⁷⁹ This fact is noted in the recent work, *Superior Generals*, issued by the Sisters of Holy Cross on the occasion of their centenary: "From their foundation in America in 1843, the Sisters had been governed directly and exclusively by Father Sorin. He presided at all elections as a matter of course. The bishop of the diocese was not invited, and slight advertence was given to ecclesiastical sanction."⁸⁰ Mother Theodore probably suspected this all along, but during her visit of 1848 at Notre Dame, she saw at first hand the situation of the Community. Several of the Sisters spoke to her confidentially, weeping over their anomalous position, injurious to the Community both from a temporal and a spiritual point of view, and their suffering intensified by the recent loss of their Mother. Eventually after Mother Theodore left Notre Dame the subject matter of some of the Sisters' confidences to her came to Father Sorin's ears. She did not, of course, feel it her province to indicate his duty to him regarding the government of his Sisters, though she admitted having felt some amusement when she heard that he presided at the Sisters' chapter of faults.

One more admonitory letter Father Sorin received from Sister Saint Francis Xavier. In 1852 she heard of certain measures of his which did not meet with her approbation, among them his sending his Brothers to California to the gold fields, and during Mother Theodore's absence on the missions she wrote him one of her characteristic missives,⁸¹ recalling to his memory his early high ideals and holding up to him the importance of giving edification in view of his influence and position. Mother Theodore on her return was horrified to learn what her fervent Mistress of Novices had done and insisted upon her writing an apology for her over-zealous procedure. This she did with her customary attractive humility.

The designs of God are beyond the comprehension of weak human intellects. To Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Francis Xavier, the Foundresses of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, were given hardly sixteen years of active work in Indiana for the consolidation of their enterprise. To Father Sorin long years were accorded for the upbuilding of the magnificent work we know as Notre Dame University, to which doubtless saintly men like Brother Vincent and devoted ones like Father Cointet contributed very materially. One impelling motive power however, characterized both institutions then and later—an all-pervading devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

⁷⁸ 21 juin, 1848. S.M.W.A.

⁷⁹ Sister M. Carol Schroeder, *The Catholic Church in the Diocese of Vincennes, 1847-1877* (Catholic University Doctoral Dissertation, 1946), p. 137.

⁸⁰ Sister M. Madeleva, C.S.C., and Others, *Superior Generals*, (St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N. J.), 1941, p. 84.

⁸¹ 21 avril, 1852. N.D.U.A.

CHAPTER XXXIV

DEATHS OF SISTER SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER AND MOTHER THEODORE

"So much, so much, O my God, for
so little."

SISTER SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

DURING the autumn of 1855 the usual daily regime was almost unchanged. Sister Mary Joseph, now professed, was retained at the motherhouse. She wrote to her mother that she had not been called for the missions. Mother Theodore had other plans for her which, however, she was not divulging to any one. Sister Mary Eudoxie was busily employed as head of the music department of the academy. Sister Saint Francis Xavier seemed better in health than she had been for years. She had been admirable during the retreat, "up every single day and seeing almost all the Sisters who could not have access to Mother for anything"¹ owing to the severe attack of fever from which she was suffering. The vacation was a busy time for Sister Mary Joseph. "It is as though at home my brothers were on their vacation," she wrote, and Sister Saint Francis confirmed her statement:

I am obliged to take Sister Mary Joseph away from our Sisters to see that she writes to you. They carry her off for she alone knows certain types of embroidery and crochet. One has hardly time to breathe after the retreat as everyone wishes to learn something before returning to her mission. Sister Mary Cecilia scolds me for letting Elvire tire herself out but this dear child is common property.

Now that her sister and Mme. Le Fer, each accompanied by one of her daughters, had made the pilgrimage to Sainte Anne d'Auray, Mother Theodore had begun to feel much better. One of the precious boxes sent to France in care of the historian, Henri de Courcy, who had offered his services, had been lost. He had left Saint Augustine, Florida, where he and his family had been staying, and had returned to France, and Sister Mary Joseph wrote asking the Community's old friend, Mme. Parmentier in Brooklyn to secure the services of her son-in-law Edward Bayer in locating the lost treasure. Mme. Parmentier never lost her love for the Sisters of Providence whom she had welcomed to her hospitable home fifteen years before in September, 1840, and she continued to find pleasure in serving them. Year after year she sent valuable flower seeds with the height of the plants and the proper culture marked on each package, an old habit of hers, she said. The seeds could be sent early, and later in the autumn when the Terre Haute merchants would be in New York she could send by them the narcissus, trilliums, and other bulbs. Sometimes she included French women's magazines like *Le Conseiller de Dames* which contained models and directions for making artificial flowers which she thought would be useful. "Rosine tried the rose," she commented, "and I have never seen anything more natural. . . . We are thanking God for

¹ Sister Mary Joseph à sa mère, 18 août, 1855. S.M.W.A.

the cure of our dear Mother Theodore. I hope that you will use your authority and will try to induce her to spare herself a little. I suppose, however, that you too like her are always ready to do your part and even more."² Mme. Parmentier served the Community in many ways and was the intermediary also for registering the Sisters' names in the Confraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and later in that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the French church in New York.

Mother Theodore sent the promised likeness of Sister Mary Joseph to her mother during these autumn weeks, and Monseigneur on his continual travels about the diocese came several times for brief visits, sometimes only for dinner with Father Corbe. Sister Mary Magdalen's sister, Mrs. Crosby, arrived for a visit from Evansville and then returned to teach the Sisters one of the fashionable accomplishments of the time, to make flowers of feathers. The farm had lost a horse found dead in its stall, one of a generation of Mother Theodore's pets, "our pretty Finette, whom we had reared, fourteen years old, not sick at all at eight o'clock last evening."³ This was no doubt the "little rogue" she had written to the Sisters about from Terre Haute when she was preparing to embark on the *James Ross* for New Albany with two ladies of Mr. Samuel Crawford's family.⁴ She was very *fâchée* that day with Finette who probably in return for an apple or some tidbit offered by the Foundress had covered her habit with hairs. Finette gave her so many caresses, however, and was so *gentille* that she was disarmed. The Community was still in its years of sorrow in 1845, and the Foundress had many cares, but she did not hesitate to write little gay nothings about Finette to the Sisters at Saint Mary's to amuse them and keep up their spirits.

Mother Cecilia tells us that in the late autumn of 1855, the Foundress grew considerably better for some three months. She herself dwells upon this fact in a long letter to France in December, 1855:

It is a very long time, dear Mother, since you have written to us. We are most anxious to have news of you. Sometimes I think you must believe me dead or dying. But no; our dear Lord has been moved by so many fervent prayers that have been offered for me. I am better than I was when I last wrote to you, though I still have lung trouble and I have been obliged to stay in the house. It is six months or more since I have been outside. When I change apartments I immediately feel the difference of temperature and become worse. However, I am relieved of that overwhelming sadness which was so painful to me and which was so tiresome to the others. I grew better after a pilgrimage my sister made for me to Ste. Anne d'Auray.⁵

She was able to be up all day, she could transact business, the Sisters had access to her room at all times, and to their great joy she was seen about the house as of old before her accident on the river. On Saint Cecilia's day, the academy superior's feast, a musician from the city came to play for the pupils "who enjoyed themselves very much." The Sisters from Providence were present at the tableaux in the evening. For December 8, the first feast of the Immaculate Conception since its promulgation as a

² A Sister Saint Francis Xavier, 4 avril, 1854. S.M.W.A.

³ Community Diary.

⁴ *J. and L.*, p. 241.

⁵ A Mère Marie, 18 décembre, 1855. S.M.W.A.

dogma, the Community prepared by a general novena in all the houses⁶ and a Solemn Mass was celebrated in the chapel of the motherhouse. On the same day seven postulants received the black cap. A few days later Mother Theodore learned of the consecration at Rennes of the successor of the late lamented Bishop Bouvier in the see of Le Mans, Monseigneur Jacques Nanquette.

They had known for some time of the projected division of the Vincennes diocese decided upon at the Cincinnati Council of 1855. The spiritual renewal consequent upon English and German missions by the celebrated Jesuit missionary, Father Francis X. Weninger in New Albany, Lanesville, Vincennes, Terre Haute, Indianapolis, Lafayette, Richmond, Oldenburg, and Enochsburg during 1855 and 1856⁷ was felt throughout the diocese and gave infinite consolation to Bishop de Saint-Palais. The Community was in retreat on Christmas eve. It snowed hard all day, and the cold was intense. Mother Theodore was not able to leave the house, and several Sisters were ill with "winter fever." "We freeze near the fire," wrote the Foundress. "The cold is almost unbearable." Midnight Mass and the Mass of the Aurora were celebrated on Christmas day in the convent chapel; also Vespers in the afternoon.

On the twenty-seventh preparations began for "Mother's feast," never to be forgotten by her daughters, for it was the last. She knew it, but they could never believe that they would lose her. "Tomorrow we will dine in the refectory upstairs," she noted in the diary. The kitchen and dining room all during her lifetime were in the basement of new Providence. Not till 1863 were they moved upstairs after Mother Cecilia built the frame chapel which was destroyed in the fire of February, 1889, and was replaced by the present magnificent church. Two accounts of Saint Theodore's day in 1855 have come down to us, one very brief from Mother herself in the diary, the other more extended written by Sister Maurice to one of the Sisters on mission. "Our feast of Saint Theodore," wrote the Foundress, "was very pious and full of gratitude to God and our Immaculate Mother. Also to Saint Anne for the favors she had obtained for us." Sister Maurice's letter written two days later gives details. The Terre Haute Sisters had come home for the occasion. Sister Mary Joseph and Sister Olympiade decorated the Community room with the flower-crowned statue of Saint Anne who had cured their Mother, and the portrait of "our beloved father Bishop Bouvier," in the center a large painting of the Blessed Virgin,⁸ and in front a table with gifts. Father Corbe, Mother Theodore, Sister Saint Francis Xavier, Sister Mary Cecilia, and Sister Olympiade "sat in a nice little row" for the entertainment on the eve, consisting of music and the usual French dialogue. When the Sisters sang the French couplets written by Sister Saint Francis and sung to the air "O Fontenais," tears rolled down their Mother's cheeks. They had had supper at six instead of seven and "retired pretty late," probably ten o'clock instead of the usual nine-fifteen.

⁶ The Litany of Loretto, the Magnificat, and twelve times the aspiration, "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."

⁷ Statement of Rev. M. J. Boylan, S.J.

⁸ Probably the large canvas of the Immaculate Conception received from Mme. Le Fer the previous October.

Next day dinner was served upstairs again and supper, and afterwards Mother Theodore was with them again. The Sisters sang a "beautiful festive song" which Sister Mary Celestia, the Community poet, had sent from Fort Wayne. Then their Mother kissed them all, two kisses for the feast, and the great day was over. The custom of two kisses at meeting and parting and on great occasions, which lasted till comparatively recent times, was not confined to the Sisters. The American girls observed with great interest that when Father Chassé came to Saint Mary's, Father Corbe met him at his little white gate, and they always kissed each other on both cheeks.⁹ Sister Maurice's letter¹⁰ ends with a reference to the bitter cold. The wine had frozen in the chalice during Mass at the church.

A copy of the verses composed by Sister Saint Francis Xavier for Mother Theodore's feast of 1855 was sent to France to Mme. Le Fer and was returned in 1888:

1

Pour ta fête, Mère tendre et chérie,
Des séraphins j'envie les harpes d'or;
"Theo"—de Dieu—traduction bénie
Ton nom si beau pour nous est un trésor.

2

Présent du Ciel! Sage et fidèle amie,
Pour te chanter nous unissons nos voix,
Car pour t'aimer, nos cœurs de l'harmonie
Ont su toujours suivre les douces lois.

3

Auprès de toi, heureuse est notre vie,
Même l'exil a pour nous des douceurs;
Par toi conduites en la sainte Patrie,
De tes enfants qu'il sera le bonheur!

Sister Mary Joseph had written a few words on the original: "For Maman—poor Mother Theodore cried when she heard them sung."¹¹

During the winter of 1855, Mother Theodore definitively abandoned any idea of procuring in the future the black goods needed in the Community from France. The Baltimore merchants were importing good French cashmere, serge, and merino for the American convents, and early in January she ordered three hundred yards of habit goods, one hundred yards each of materials for cloaks and shawls, and four hundred yards of white muslin wide enough for the Sisters' fichus, which Madame Parmentier had great difficulty in finding in New York. She also ordered twenty pieces of solid blue calico for aprons, hitherto almost impossible to procure in America. Considerable changes were taking place in the village of Saint Mary's. Jacob Thralls, one of the first settlers of the vicinity, was emigrating with his large family to Missouri, and Louis Alvey was leaving the inn on the Community property near the village called "The Visitors' Home." Logan and his new wife were renting it for a hundred dollars a year and would be in charge. Sister Olympiade was

⁹ Remembrances of Sister Ann Cecilia.

¹⁰ December 30, 1855. S.M.W.A.

¹¹ 28 décembre, 1855. S.M.W.A.

busily engaged in supervising the salting and curing of the season's pork, eight thousand pounds, and in rendering six barrels of lard, an excellent supply.

The winter was proving to be the severest in twenty years, and the Foundress suffered acutely from it. Sister Saint Francis Xavier tells us that Mother Theodore's lungs were bleeding as early as August, 1854, and the bitter cold of this, her last winter on earth, must have cut through them with knife-like severity. "The winter is so cold," she wrote, "that I am surprised that poor weak chests are not entirely frozen."¹² The cold had set in in October, and heavy snow covered the ground for months. Fire broke out several times, usually in the kitchens, and as a precaution all the chimneys were thoroughly swept. Christmas day had been very cold and a few days after New Year's the thermometer registered fourteen below zero. Mother Theodore noted that her blood was freezing from the cold. Everything in the kitchen was frozen. Happily they were having Sunday Mass in the convent chapel. "My God, Thy will be done," was the Foundress's act of conformity.

A very important matter was occupying the interest of the Community at this time, the new road over the river bottom high enough to escape the periodical floods. The agitation had been on since 1853 in the Terre Haute newspapers. When the roads were impassable in winter or spring, the western farmers stopped their regular weekly trips to Terre Haute and business suffered. "A generation or more has passed since the organization of the county," wrote the editor of the *Wabash Express* in August, 1854,¹³ "and yet this at times impassable gulf was permitted to remain as a standing reproach to the enterprise and public spirit of our citizens, cutting off all trade and business between our county seat, Terre Haute, and the west side of the county." Mother Theodore was invited to a meeting of interested persons in the summer of 1854 at the Terre Haute court house. Three routes were discussed: the old river road, the National Road, and the Paris or Saint Mary's road. "The main object was to get out of the bottom in the quickest time and with the least expense." The middle or Paris road was generally thought the best and cheapest, and it was to be "a substantial free road" above the flood level.

The agitation continued all during 1855, and the people of Terre Haute were deeply interested. By April, 1856, arrangements were at last completed, the work to be finished by the following October, an enterprise pronounced second only to the railroads in its importance to the prosperity of Vigo County. The Terre Haute Drawbridge Company was to construct the road from the bridge to the bluff eighteen inches above the record flood mark of 1828, at an estimated cost of \$19,000. At the end of June, the contractor had begun preliminary work, and in August¹⁴ the *Wabash Courier* announced a large force of men at work and progress highly satisfactory. On November 1, the editor allowed his enthusiasm full rein:

The stupendous work is now finished, uniting the bridge with the bluff, a little over a mile across the bottom opposite Terre Haute. This bottom has been the terror of the world from time immemorial. All is now neutralized. *Terra firma* stands

¹² A Sister Maria, 18 janvier, 1856. S.M.W.A.

¹³ August 30, 1854.

¹⁴ *Wabash Courier*, August 2, 1856.

out in bold relief west from Terre Haute. We passed over this road two days ago and have to express the astonishment with which we were struck at the magnificence of the work. The great embankment is twenty-five feet wide at the top . . . and of a height several feet above the highest flood mark. We consider this one of the finest improvements for our town and county. The Draw Bridge Company . . . have substantially united Terre Haute with the great West.

Though the Foundress did not live to see it, never again would Saint Mary-of-the-Woods be cut off and isolated for weeks by the raging river.

Terre Haute was now on the way to prosperity. The Terre Haute and Alton Railroad, of which W. D. Griswold became eventually president, had connections with the Illinois Central at Mattoon for Chicago, and passengers from Chicago could reach Terre Haute in a single day's travel and embark at once by an express train for Indianapolis and the East.¹⁵ The editor of the *Wabash Courier* pronounced the ride on the cars from Mattoon to Chicago "the finest two hundred miles in the world." The canal had, however, already fallen on evil days. In June, 1854, the embankment of the reservoir at Terre Haute was cut at night by unknown persons with a consequent loss of water and an expense for repairs of thirty thousand dollars. Some time later desperadoes cut the Eel River reservoir, fourteen miles south of Terre Haute,¹⁶ and during the next year a group of men with blackened faces cut the Birch Creek reservoir and drove off the repair crews.¹⁷ Some of the repairs were made by militia under arms.¹⁸ The canal management had now arranged to cut the trees to water level in the Birch Creek reservoir except a fringe next the embankment to obviate erosion, in order to placate the people, who erroneously attributed the current summer malaria to standing water with trees in it. The railroad, however, met with little opposition even from the first. The night express trains in particular were very popular. "The iron horse with his great lamp in front illuminating the track a long distance ahead, lets you know very soon that he can run by night as well as by day and that he can carry you along in gallant style over the rails and far away. We understand the night trains are running very full, as traveling has been considerably increased since the connection with Saint Louis."¹⁹

During the year 1855 the Know-Nothing agitation reached its last outstanding successes. "The Know-Nothings do much harm here," wrote Mother Theodore to Madame Parmentier in October, 1855.²⁰ "They are, however, beginning to descend from the heights to which they had risen and are now thought to be less powerful." The Academy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had opened with a satisfactory enrollment. Saint Vincent's, too, in Terre Haute registered some one hundred and forty "externs," as the day pupils were called, and Sister Caroline had twenty-six "music scholars," an excellent record for the time. The orgy of plunder, arson, and murder of the election day, August 6, 1855, in Louisville, Kentucky,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, August 4, 1856.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, May 5, 1855.

¹⁷ *Wabash Courier*, June 2, 1856.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, June 22, 1855.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ 2 octobre, 1855. S.M.W.A.

in which over twenty persons were killed and property destroyed to the amount of many thousands of dollars during a riot in which some Indians were reported to have joined, discredited the Know-Nothing Party and seriously affected the prosperity of the state by causing immigrants to avoid it permanently.²¹ "If the Republican candidate, who is the son of a Frenchman from the vicinity of Lyons,"²² wrote Father Corbe in October, 1856, to Abbé Collet, Sister Mary Joseph's confessor, at Saint-Servan in France, "is elected to the Presidency in the elections which will take place next month, we shall be exposed to many dangers."²³ The parents of the French priests and Sisters in Indiana had all been through the Reign of Terror in France, and they themselves were living during the Revolution of 1830, and had seen the barricades and the fighting in the streets. They never took into account the radical difference between the Latins and the northern races in Europe, and the essential stability of the American character. In America, too, the best elements in the population never avoided politics nor gave up all interest in their government, something which was done in France, till comparatively recent times.

Father DuPontavice had, however, summed up the general verdict among thoughtful observers that the Know-Nothing movement had not been of any permanent injury to the Church. No state had suffered more severely than Kentucky, yet the Most Reverend Martin John Spalding, then Bishop of Louisville, in his episcopal visitation of the diocese in 1855 and 1856 found keen interest in Catholicism among Protestants and renewed zeal among Catholics.²⁴ A new organ for the Know-Nothings and their candidate Fillmore, the *Daily Union*, began its propaganda in Terre Haute on September 6, 1856, two months before the presidential election, but after Fillmore's defeat in 1856, the party was never again a powerful national force.

During this last year of Mother Theodore's life, the Community's excellent chaplain, Father Corbe, continued still the exemplary and devoted priest he had always been. The Sisters were deeply attached to him and grateful for his unfailing interest. Sister Saint Francis Xavier often voices these sentiments in her letters:

We have an excellent superior in Father Corbe. . . . One must confess that he is admirably endowed and no one could be at once more prudent or more simple. God created him and placed him in the world to be superior of a community like ours. He loves all the Sisters without preference for any one. He mourned for poor little Josephine as one grieves for a cherished child . . . but he grieved also over all those who had died before.²⁵

Father Corbe's interest in the spiritual welfare of the Sisters on mission appears in his letters to the Sisters at the various houses of which the following, probably to Sister Mary James, in his characteristic English is an illustration:

²¹ Sister Agnes Geraldine McGann, *Nativism in Kentucky to 1860* (Catholic University Doctoral Dissertation, 1944), p. 95.

²² John C. Fremont.

²³ 12 octobre, 1856. S.M.W.A.

²⁴ Sister Agnes Geraldine McGann. *Nativism in Kentucky*, p. 112.

²⁵ A Mère Marie, 2 juin, 1855. S.M.W.A.

MY GOOD AND DEAR SISTER,

I received your two kind letters in due time, and I will not let you wait for an answer any longer, but now what could I tell you? Your last letter was so good and I saw by it so good dispositions in you that I can only exhort you to continue. I was so well pleased with your resolute courage that I prayed to God to keep it up in your heart. I am confident that He will do it. Though you have received more abundantly the graces of God, do not cease your vigilance and your exertions. On a contrary, more you are favored from God, greater are your obligations to Him. The principal point for you is to prepare yourself well to your communions by good meditations, and to take every morning good practical resolutions. With this, I may assure you that you will love God and that you will fulfill all your duties actuated by that love. It will fill up your heart and your mind, and there will be in them no room for temptation or sin.

I am very glad to hear that you are pleased with your mission. I knew it would be so and that you could not be better anywhere else. All your Sisters are kind, cheerful, and zealous. Therefore you have all that is necessary to love and esteem your vocation. There may be now amongst you a little sadness on account of the indisposition of Sister Clementine, but I hope on taking good care she will soon be well. I am very anxious to know how she is. I want you to write to me soon and give me all the news. I suppose that Sister Anastasie is painting away, giving to that all her spare time. She does well. I hope she will have many things very beautiful to show when I will see you.

At St. Mary's everything is as usual. All the Sisters are well. Mother is getting every day stronger. We commence to prepare for her feast.

Respects and affection to all your Sisters—present also my respect to Mr. Deydier and Mr. McDermott. As to you

Receive the assurance of my
most sincere affection

J. CORBE²⁶

P.S. How is Mr. Roquet?

December 10, 1854

St. Mary's of the Woods

How deeply his solitary life weighed upon him is evident, however, in his letters to Father Martin, his old friend whom he never ceased to regret. After Bishop Martin's consecration, their correspondence languished. The Bishop was in Europe and later was busied with the organization of his diocese, and Father Corbe's own *péché mignon*,²⁷ procrastination, delayed his letters. He gradually gave up his old pursuits to devote himself to his books and to a deeper cultivation of the spiritual life. "I never go hunting any more," he wrote to Bishop Martin. "I have also given up my search for mineralogical specimens, and I never go out collecting butterflies. . . . You see I do very little. Oh, may this little be agreeable to God, and suffice to find grace before Him. This is the only object of my desires and the only desire of my heart."²⁸

He still continued his daguerreotyping and painted now and then. "Father Corbe painted Sister Saint Francis from her daguerreotype," wrote Sister Mary Joseph to her mother, "more perhaps from memory. I recognized it, but the daguerreotype is better." His feast day in June was always a gala day. Like so many Bretons and French Canadians his

²⁶ S.M.W.A.

²⁷ Besetting weakness.

²⁸ A Mgr. Martin, 4 décembre, 1855. S.M.W.A.

patron was the great Precursor of Our Lord. A *soirée* in his honor took place on the eve with the usual program of music and original congratulatory couplets sung to a familiar air, sometimes in English but usually in French. Father Corbe's kind eyes shone with pleasure when the fresh voices of the novices sang the praises of his great patron:

Chantons aujourd' hui la mémoire
Chantons de Saint Jean les vertus
De tout son triomphe et sa gloire.
Il est le premier des élus.²⁹

His gifts were a silver pencil, or a pair of gold glasses, or a new velvet *bonnet carré*.³⁰ One year Mother Theodore noted among her accounts "Firecrackers for Notre Père's feast." Perhaps no one was to be more deeply afflicted than Father Corbe at the great sorrows which were so soon to befall the Community.

Sister Saint Francis Xavier's health, as we know, had been delicate for years. Though somewhat above medium height, she was very slight of build. A pair of bedroom slippers, probably sent from France and hardly worn, preserved in the museum, are almost incredibly small. This frail physical constitution all but prevented her ever seeing Indiana at the very outset of her religious life. We have noted that on the ocean during her voyage to America in the summer of 1841, she overheard the superior of the religious of the Sacred Heart who were traveling with her, Mother Sallion, speaking to the captain about the disposition to be made of her remains after she expired.

"This dear Sister is truly like the morning dew. She is inconceivably delicate," wrote the Foundress to France in 1854.³¹ She was confined to her room one or two days of every week, yet Mother Theodore offered her daguerreotype to her family in 1853 as a proof that she was better than when she had reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods twelve years earlier. She required, however, infinite care. In summer, when the humidity of the air became oppressive, she could hardly breathe. The Community was well acquainted with "Sister Saint Francis Xavier's smothering spells," but the chest weakness they connoted always alarmed Mother Theodore. In winter she suffered from severe colds upon the least exposure. The old Thralls convent was glacial at times, and the first winter in the unfinished motherhouse was even colder. Mother had ordered a hot brick for her feet, and a postulant had charge of carrying the "greenhouse," as its receptacle was called, wherever Sister went. One morning the brick was not warm enough, and she took a severe cold. These attacks, longer or shorter, were often accompanied with acute neuralgic pains in her head and neck. She had had a sharp attack of cold and neuralgia on All Souls Day, but two days later she was better.

During the fourteen years she spent at Saint Mary-of-the Woods she gave to the Community the continued daily spectacle of a life of sublime sanctity. She fulfilled to the letter her own definition of a true Sister of Providence, "one who has taken at her profession Jesus Crucified for her

²⁹ S.M.W.A.

³⁰ biretta.

³¹ A Mère Marie, 4 janvier, 1854. S.M.W.A.

beloved Spouse." According to Saint Thomas every religious order exemplifies some special virtue of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which it chooses to honor in a particular manner. This chosen virtue, this special mark and distinctive characteristic of the Sister of Providence is the love of God. This love, overflowing in ardent zeal, desires to make Him known and loved by others also.³² This burning zeal was so marked a characteristic of Sister Saint Francis Xavier that it was singled out to be commemorated in the inscription placed upon the cross which marks her grave. "*Zelus domus tuæ comedit me.*" Mother Theodore in her letters often refers to the veneration in which she was held by the Community, who almost unanimously looked upon her as a saint.

She made the same impression upon the clear-sighted French priests of the diocese and in even greater degree upon the Jesuit retreat masters, experienced and deeply spiritual men. Father Gleizal gave as his opinion after her death³³ that she had for years practiced the most exalted sanctity, and Father Isidore Boudreaux, S.J., who conducted in 1855 the last retreat Sister Saint Francis made on earth, wrote that he had observed then the degree of perfection to which she had attained and when he heard later of her beautiful death, he was in no way surprised.³⁴ "In speaking of Sister Saint Francis," wrote Father Gleizal, "one of our Fathers who knew her wrote to me a few days ago, 'As soon as I heard of her death, I prayed to her, and sure enough, what I asked I got.' "³⁵

Early in her religious life at Ruillé, her incapacity for the homely duties of housekeeping and the teaching of young children had brought upon her from Mother Mary the judgment "good only to love God," and far from letting this verdict discourage her, she received it humbly and took it for her life's device and loftiest ambition. Too delicate for austerities, she found the way to the highest perfection in the simple daily immolation of divine love, another Little Flower of Jesus, blooming and exhaling her heavenly fragrance in the depths of the Indiana woods. Not a Sister who knew her but had some striking incident to relate of her love and zeal, her devotion to giving instruction in religion, her faith and her sublime confidence.

This all-embracing zeal seemed, to many who knew her, her outstanding characteristic. The instruction of children, especially neglected ones, and of converts, was a good work which appealed to her irresistibly and in which she had striking success. But her zeal reached out in all directions with equally remarkable results. Placed by Bishop de Saint-Palais in charge of establishing the Propagation of the Faith in the diocese, she quickly succeeded in forming forty circles. She inaugurated an association among her relatives and friends in France, *L'Oeuvre de Marie au Temple*,³⁶ to furnish vestments and sacred articles for the poor churches of America. She gathered together a lending library of good books for the people of the countryside and contributed greatly to the extension in America of the

³² *Constitutions*. Chapter on the Love of God.

³³ A Sister Mary Joseph, 9 juillet, 1856. S.M.W.A.

³⁴ A la même, 20 décembre, 1879. S.M.W.A.

³⁵ A la même, 24 mai, 1856. S.M.W.A.

³⁶ The Work of Mary in the Temple.

Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She was very ingenious in seeking out new ways of doing good.

Contrition had seemingly no overt place in her scheme of sanctity. She went straight to God with the simple trust and reliance of a child, yet her humility was such that at Christmas she would never approach nearer the Crib than with the animals at its foot. Her life is a proof of the final dictum of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, "Love alone matters." This pervasive love of God brought her every virtue. Her obedience was heroic, her charity proverbial. The anxious or distressed of mind found in her ever ready counsel and consolation. To anyone in need of help she turned spontaneously, to give her services as though she had no other duty. Interrupted constantly, she vied with her beloved Mother Theodore in "never showing the least reluctance."³⁷ Her superior's verdict upon her in a letter to Father Gleizal³⁸ after her death is her most eloquent eulogy:

During the fifteen years of her life at Saint Mary's we saw her walk with a firm step in the constant practice of perfection, without ever relaxing or showing those vicissitudes of good and bad days so common among persons of our own age. She was always a fervent religious, and I dare say it to you, Father, the most perfect I have ever known.

Intellectually she was highly gifted, with a keen mind, a delightful and piquant humor, and a literary taste which appears in her charming letters. For some years in her youth she had devoted herself to study and to intellectual pursuits with great assiduity, but the death of a friend, Angelina Payan, for whom she cherished a deep affection turned her mind irrevocably to divine things. She became deeply learned in Church history, in doctrine, and kindred subjects, and was ingenious and successful in imparting them.

Her influence over souls was immense, and some of her sayings almost incredible. To a Sister who was unduly fearful of the judgment of God, she said, "Do not be uneasy. I will be responsible for your salvation"³⁹ and to another, "Love Our Lord. Love Him as I do. He grants me everything." The celestial power of her prayer was so well known that the Sisters felt as long as she lived Mother Theodore could never die. She had shown the Community from day to day for fourteen years how to live the sublime life of divine love. She was now to show them in a short illness of eight days how the saints die. Three accounts have come down to us: Mother Theodore's, in the diary, the circular to the missions after her death, and in several letters; Sister Mary Joseph's in a letter to her mother afterwards printed in the *Life of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*; and Mother Cecilia's account in her manuscript life of Sister Saint Francis.⁴⁰

On January 23 Mother Theodore noted in the diary her illness "of a nervous malady," to which Mother Theodore could give no accurate name, "with high fever and inexpressible pain in the right side of her chest and

³⁷ Mother Cecilia's MS. Life.

³⁸ *Life of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 404.

³⁹ Sister Mary Angèle.

⁴⁰ The following pages are taken from Mother Theodore's long letter to France of 8 février, 1856, and Sister Mary Joseph's account.

in her neck and head.”⁴¹ Sister Mary Joseph had been painting the previous day, and Sister Saint Francis Xavier came down to see her work and went into the court. She probably took cold as the snow was on the ground and the weather was very severe. From the first her illness was most serious with a raging fever and some slight delirium. Mother Theodore was alarmed almost from the beginning. “The patient’s pain and fever increase,” she noted on January 25. “O my God, save her for Thy glory and our good.” Next day, Saturday, she was a little better. She was able to go to Confession, and Father Corbe brought her Holy Communion which, on account of her weakness, he allowed her to receive as Viaticum. “This day, one of afflictions, crosses, and trials,” wrote the Foundress in the diary. “O my God, Thy Will be done. Our dear patient has received Holy Viaticum.” No one except Mother Theodore seemed to realize how ill she was.

As this dear child was taken from us so suddenly, she later wrote to France, no one was expecting her death, and she least of all. From the first day she was somewhat delirious. She showed such religious exaltation that I almost regretted she was so fervent. In the beginning instead of speaking to her of God I tried to distract her mind and talk about other things; but when I saw it was useless I let her alone. But I perceived very clearly that we had to give up the hope of keeping her with us, so I made my sacrifice to Our Lord, and my heart has remained firm on the Altar of holocaust.⁴²

On Sunday, January 27, the patient remained much the same but prostrate with weakness and no better. On this day the Community lost a tried and faithful servitor. Père Michel, the father of three Sisters of Providence and grandfather of two others, was found on the morning of the twenty-seventh quietly sleeping his last long sleep. “He has been attached for twelve years to our house,” wrote the Foundress in the diary, “where he has worked with the utmost devotedness. He has gone to receive in heaven the reward of his labors, of his love for the Community, and especially of the Christian virtues which he practiced like a saint.” The Sisters on the missions were now being kept in touch with Sister Saint Francis’s illness, and Mother herself wrote to Sister Saint Vincent,⁴³ recalling that she had often remarked that the month of January in Indiana was terrible for the French Sisters. Mother Theodore had just left Sister Saint Francis’s bedside where she had been trying to distract her that she might not hear Père Michel’s funeral procession which was passing under her windows. Mother Theodore was deeply impressed by this good man’s death. “That is not all,” she said sadly to Sister Mary Cecilia. “You will see. Sister Saint Francis will die.”⁴⁴

On the twenty-eighth Mother Theodore met Sister Mary Joseph coming from Community Mass in the morning. “My daughter,” she said, “I find that my dear Sister Saint Francis is dangerously ill. I fear that she cannot recover.”⁴⁵

To beg her cure, the novices continued all day in prayer in the chapel, continues Sister Mary Joseph’s account. By turns, without interruption, they recited the

⁴¹ Community Diary.

⁴² 8 février, 1856. S.M.W.A.

⁴³ 28 janvier, 1856. S.M.W.A.

⁴⁴ Mother Cecilia’s MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 72.

⁴⁵ *The Life of Sister St. Francis Xavier*, p. 395.

Rosary for our dear patient. After some hours of suspense, her condition gave hope, and for the first time in six days we were able to move her.

A little later when I happened to be alone with her she began to hold sweet converse with Our Lord. Though I was behind an armchair I could hear her tender sighs: "O Jesus, my Jesus, I love You! O my sweet Jesus, how much I love You." I thought to myself, Now, my dear little Sister, I shall find out how you make your meditation. After all, it will not be difficult, if you always repeat the same thing. But it was not the words,—Oh no!—it was the tone with which she pronounced them. And when she began again even more vehemently, "Jesus, O my Jesus! Jesus, my love!" I went near the fireplace to hide my tears, asking Our Lord whether He did not hear her. Our Sister Infirmarian Sister Olympiade entered the room, and I noticed that during the ten minutes she remained Sister Saint Francis Xavier was silent; but as soon as she had gone her loving strain recommenced: "Jesus, my Jesus, how good You are! Jesus, You know I love You as much as I am able to love! O my God! if this is earth, what will heaven be? O Our Lady of La Salette, I love you!"

Fearing she would fatigue herself by talking so much, I left her to look for Mother Theodore. "O my child!" said Mother, "I am very uneasy. Sister Saint Francis says she is well, very well, and yet her pulse is so quick that if I did not know how nervous she is, I would have her receive Extreme Unction." "But, Mother," I replied, "perhaps Our Lord wishes to work a miracle. When *you* are sick she prevents you from dying!" "Alas!" sighed Mother, "who of us has her faith to save her? Do you not see God has inspired her with the belief that she is well, so that she will not ask Him for a cure which He would not refuse her? She is ripe for Heaven."⁴⁶

In her delirium, wrote Mother Theodore, she thought herself cured, and every one thought the same, so much so that on the 28th of January, sixth day of her illness, she had me called to confide to me the secret of her cure. She said she was entirely cured and she was accepting the care of her nurses only to obey me. Her sister, Sister Mary Joseph, believed it, Sister Olympiade also; but I, who remarked her distracted looks, who found her pulse 130, cannot tell you what I suffered in not being able to share my fears with any one. In the evening the illusion was so general that all the preparations were made for her to go to Mass the next morning, the feast of St. Francis de Sales. She had taken some water of La Salette and she was cured!

I wept, seeing the error of my poor Sisters. The dear patient in a burst of gratitude was exalted to such an extent that the over-excitement rendered her condition at each moment more alarming. At last, to please her we consented to leave her alone with just her regular nurse. I yielded in order to give her the chance of getting a little rest. I threw myself on my bed with a sad presentiment in my heart.⁴⁷

On this same evening, Monday, January 28, Sister Mary Joseph, too, had retired to take a little rest.

About ten o'clock, continues Sister Mary Joseph's letter, Sister Julia, who was watching by Irma during the night, hurried to my room calling out, "Quick! quick! come, Sister Saint Francis is much worse." Trembling, I went and found her,—O my mother!—with joined hands raised towards heaven, crying aloud: "I believe, O my God! I believe; You have said it! How great is the happiness reserved for those who love You! I believe, my God, I believe! I am in heaven!—I am in heaven!" She raised her voice as she uttered these words. I said to myself: "Her heart will break; she is going to die." "I see God! I see God! Oh! how beautiful! I see God!" "There now, my dear Sister," I said to her, "adore Him in silence."

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

⁴⁷ A Mère Marie, 8 février, 1856. S.M.W.A.

But she did not hear me. "I am in God; all is in God!—O my good Mother!—O Mary, how beautiful you are! . . . O my God," she said suddenly, "if such is Your will that I return to earth to begin again to live, to suffer, to die for Your love, I consent, my God. Where You wish and as You wish; but I am to go to heaven! I believe, I believe."

Mother Theodore, too, had heard the door of her room open at ten o'clock.

Trembling, I began dressing myself so as to be protected from the cold, the like of which we had not yet experienced in America, but before I had put on my habit I heard piercing cries coming from her room and filling the whole house.

When I reached her bedside, Sister Mary Joseph and Sister Olympiade were there. The sick one neither saw nor heard anything and continued to utter burning words, which escaped like a torrent that had broken its dike. I could not make her hear me for nearly half an hour. We went to get Father Corbe to give her Extreme Unction. Then little by little she returned to herself and appeared surprised to see us all there.

"I remained watching beside her," continues Sister Mary Joseph's narrative. "Once or twice she said to me, 'May I speak? Have I permission?' I told her if it were not absolutely necessary to speak, it would be better to keep silence. She did so." Towards five o'clock next morning, Tuesday, January 29, the patient sent Sister Mary Joseph for Mother, and

. . . in a lucid moment, continues Mother Theodore, she sent all the others away from the room, to tell me what it was that made her cry out so loudly during the night. "It was," she said, "because I had a real ecstasy. Our Lord called me by my name and said, 'Irma!' Opening my eyes I found myself in heaven! O Mother, how beautiful it is! How ineffable is the happiness of heaven! I saw it, I possessed it already, and they would prevent me from crying out!"

Seeing that she was very tired, I bade her stop there. "I do not doubt at all, my little daughter," I said to her, "that you will have heaven, and Our Lord has consoled your soul by showing it to you, but His will now is that you calm yourself and be quiet; so, do not speak, even to me. She was silent, but two minutes later she began again: "O Jesus! O Love! O Justice!" and so on.

Her eyes beamed with a celestial fire; an angelic smile was on her lips. She seemed completely wrapped in God. From time to time she had flashes of lucidity; she would then call me to her, take me in her arms, stiff as iron, and almost suffocate me. It is incredible the strength she had in speaking and crying out and gripping like the vises of the winepress. She did not have a moment's rest.

It was the feast of Saint Francis de Sales. The Community offered a general Communion for the sick Sister.

I offered my Communion for our dear sick Sister, continues Sister Mary Joseph. . . . Understanding that Mother considered her dangerously sick, she herself asked for Extreme Unction. I embraced her and gave her her large crucifix, on which she had made her contract with Our Lord promising Him to work and suffer for Him, and receiving the promise of heaven in exchange. Alas! though I found her ill enough to make me think she must die, I nevertheless expected a miracle.

She was anointed on Tuesday, the 29th, at half past seven in the morning. Her pulse was one hundred and forty. Later in the morning her fever rose, and Father Corbe gave the general absolution in the presence of the Community. She slept a little under the influence of an opiate prescribed by Dr. Read.

She received the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction with intense fervor, continues Mother Theodore, after which she was more quiet still for a short time. But her lips were moving and, suddenly, she sat up in her bed and began speaking to Jesus with greater vehemence and new expressions of tenderness, although she was visibly growing weaker.

Next day, January 30, she asked to speak to Mother again very early in the morning.

About three o'clock [A.M.] I went to throw myself on my bed, continues Mother Theodore. I was so fatigued that I thought I could never get up again. At five o'clock she had recovered her reason, and asked for me again. When we were alone she said she had something more to say to me but she feared it was too late. Oh, then I prayed Our Lord hard to give her the strength to tell me what she wished to say, if it were for His glory.

"Is it for your postulants?" I asked. "No, Mother." "Is it for the Congregation, my little daughter?" "No, Mother." Then I said, "Is it for myself? You have always told me frankly your thoughts; you will do so again, my daughter, will you not?" A smile was her response. Then she said, "It concerns the vision I had the other evening. I need advice to know what I should do."

I replied: "My daughter, you have nothing to do but put yourself in the arms of God and tell Him to do with you what He wishes; that is all, my child."

She resumed: "My vision was short, but the memory of it has left in my soul an impression that will never pass away. I was so happy to see and hear Jesus, Who said to me, 'You are to enjoy these delights for all eternity.' I thought I had died," she continued, "but Our Lord added, 'You will not have just yet all this eternal happiness.'"

Here I interrupted her: "So Our Lord is going to leave you with us?" I asked. "Yes," she replied, "I shall continue in the state in which I am one day or two," (she said that on Wednesday, the 30th, in the morning, and on Thursday, the 31st, at two o'clock in the afternoon, her sufferings were ended)—"and after that I shall go to heaven forever, forever," and she repeated the word.

Then, fixing her gaze upon me, she said: "You will come with me, my little Mother dear, for you also will be saved, and together we shall enjoy God during Eternity." At this moment her sister entered. She looked at her, saying, "You also will come to be with us there." After that she was very quiet for a few moments.

She continued, however, to repeat, "Forever, O my God! and for so little! for so little!" wrote Sister Mary Joseph. "So much happiness for so little!" In the moments of her greatest sufferings she would become calm as soon as Mother pronounced the name of Jesus. "O my Jesus," she would repeat, "how good You are! It is You, it is You, Yourself, O my God, Who come to console me, to sustain me! How happy I am! Heart of my Jesus, how happy I am!"

On Wednesday, January 30, she said to me, "I am suffering much; I believe I am going to die. My poor dear novices! I am not able to speak to them, and I had so much to say. And our dear little girls at the academy, poor children!" This was the only time she spoke of her death, and it passed like a flash.⁴⁸

Towards two o'clock Wednesday, January 30, continues Mother Theodore, she had her last moments of rational delirium, if I may thus qualify it, and she was then beautiful, beautiful enough to picture. The Sister who was watching with me [Sister Mary Cecilia] remarked it. She left a moment now to admit one of the Sisters from Terre Haute who desired to see her. It was then that occurred the

⁴⁸ *Life of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 399.

last flash of reason of which I have spoken. Sister Saint Francis sat up in her bed, and looking at her crucifix with eyes full of love, she begged God to pardon her her sins, she spoke the name of Jesus in the Eucharist at least six times in succession and called Him her love, her life, her hope, and all the other beautiful things she knew so well how to say.⁴⁰

On Thursday, records Sister Mary Joseph, she became so weak that Our Mother assembled the Community and recited the prayers for the agonizing. For a little time she seemed better, but soon the exhaustion returned. All the Sisters came in turn to give her the last embrace. They placed in her hands her crucifix and the formula of her Vows. All this time I held her in my arms and Mother recited the prayers. About two o'clock in the afternoon she turned her dying eyes toward Heaven, and I was still waiting for her last sigh when Mother Theodore said *De profundis!*⁵⁰

In the opening lines of her long letter to the superiors in France, Mother Theodore told in pathetic words the immensity of the Community's loss:

How the news that I come to impart is going to afflict you! Our very dear, our beloved Sister St. Francis Xavier is no longer of this world. She was taken from us the last day of January after an illness of eight days, by a sort of tetanus which from the beginning left us little hope of saving her.

I think, however, that I shall speak more truly if I say this dear Sister died of an excess of love of God, of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Her only chance of recovery was in perfect calm which alone could quiet her highly-wrought nerves. But calm was impossible to her. Her heart seemed no longer able to contain her transports of love.

This divine fire gushed from her lips like a volcano that has broken all the bounds to prevent its eruption, and poured forth in a torrent of burning words with such force that she was heard from one end of the house to the other. Nothing could stop it. After having called upon Jesus in the Holy Eucharist twenty times in succession she would address Him by all the loving appellations in the French vocabulary; and when her memory could recall no others she coined new endearing terms for her dearly Beloved, taking breath only to begin again on a higher tone. How beautiful she was, dear Mother, how beautiful this cherished Sister was when she spoke thus to her God. Her eyes, her mouth, her whole being seemed to belong to the angelic nature. She was no longer on this earth. Heaven alone was the element of this elect soul.

Very soon I understood that Our Lord wished to take her to Himself and I made my sacrifice, while the whole community in prayer day and night was beseeching for her recovery. But I asked nothing more than the grace to remain resigned to the Will of God which seemed to me very clearly manifest. She could not live in the defilement of this earth.

The loss we have sustained is immense—you know that well. Sister St. Francis was the soul of our Congregation. She gave it her spirit, and upheld it by her exhortations, her letters, her prayers, and by her example. For me in particular she was a friend that one does not lose twice in a lifetime. She filled the void left in so many instances by my failures. She encouraged me by her example and good counsels; she reproved me for my faults with a charity and courage which my brusqueness and my haughty and imperious character had never discouraged; in a word, she was everything to me. Her death leaves me as it were alone in the midst of the community. I was so stunned that I am as a poor broken-down machine since I lost her.

⁴⁰ Aux Supérieures de Ruillé.

⁵⁰ *Life of Sister Saint Francis Xavier*, p. 399.

I did not think, neither did the Sisters, that in my poor state of health I could survive this dear Sister. I could hardly sit up when she fell sick, and during the last four days I scarcely left her at all day or night. I asked of Our Lady only that I might live long enough to close her eyes when she would die. Then I asked to live till she was buried; finally, I prayed Our Lord to let me live long enough and enable me to issue the Letter Circular and write to you. More than that I have asked nothing.

I am in a state of stupor difficult to describe. Sister Mary Cecilia and several others are under the same painful impression. . . .

God gave me the strength to assist her in her last moments and to say for her three times the prayers for the agonizing and the recommendation of her soul. But that was the end for me. I was seized with a hemorrhage from the lungs which, no doubt, was caused by the violent exertions I made to finish. Sister Mary Joseph has been admirable in courage and magnanimity. She hardly left her sister for a moment and she bore and still bears the loss of Sister St. Francis with more generosity than any of us. She is a daughter who will go very far in the practice of perfection if she continues as now.

As it was so unexpected, the death of Sister St. Francis has plunged our little Congregation into the greatest consternation. She was loved by all her Sisters and she loved them all, and nobody was jealous. Her death is a real calamity, but the Lord can draw good from it for us, and I have the confidence that He will do so.

I am bringing Sister Mary Cecilia to the motherhouse and we must necessarily begin to organize a house which up to this day has been managed by Sister St. Francis and myself. A new era is about to begin for this Congregation, but, I repeat it, I hope it will be an era for its progress and its well-being. You will pray for your daughters of the Woods and the good God will protect them. They have one more protectress in heaven within the last few days—she so greatly loved her dear mission!

We were only four professed Sisters from Ruillé at St. Mary's. And lo! one has left for Eternity. I beg of you, my Mothers, what I regard as her right, that you will announce her death by a Letter Circular to all the Sisters in France and that they will offer for her the prayers prescribed by our Constitutions. We all feel here that she has no need of them, but prayers are never lost. If, as she so greatly desired, she has made her purgatory here on earth; or if her love for Jesus was so strong that He could not allow her to be an instant separated from Him, such will not be the case for the three of us who are to follow her. I greatly fear that we will have much to pay to the Divine Justice after our death, particularly I who must follow soon this dear child to the tomb. Oh, I shall have great need that all my Sisters will do a holy violence to heaven to obtain for me mercy for a life so long and so badly employed and for so many obligations badly fulfilled.

I beg your pardon for sending a letter so poorly done when I had so many beautiful things to say. But, truly, my poor head is very miserable and my health also. In addition, we have a winter of such rigor that the memory of man has not seen the like in America. For seven weeks Terre Haute has been covered with a heavy fall of snow; very fortunately, however, for without that, the wheat, vegetables, flowers, and even the trees would be frozen. They are carting wood on the Wabash River; and on the Ohio, the ice is so thick that parties are held on it numbering vast crowds of people. At Cincinnati shops are put up on the ice for workmen, merchants, etc., and the steam cars of the railroads are often obliged to stop running because it is impossible to get water. Our Bishop was two days coming here from Vincennes last week on that account. Ice is everywhere.⁵¹

⁵¹ 8 février, 1856. S.M.W.A.

Mother Theodore could pour forth the sorrow of her loving heart to her French superiors and did so. To her daughters she was as ever the valiant woman, and was never more admirable than when offering some sacrifice to the Divine Will. When the weeping Sisters clustered around the couch upon which Sister Saint Francis Xavier had just expired, Mother Theodore, who still sat near the head of the bed, roused herself from the silent grief to which she had abandoned herself. "My dear Sisters," she said, "since we have a sacrifice to make, let us make it generously and not yield to immoderate grief." She checked her own tears and began giving directions for the last duties to the beloved departed.⁶² Sister Mary Joseph closed her sister's eyes. Her remains, the formula of her Vows in her clasped hands and a wreath of white roses at her feet, were exposed in the chapel draped in white with black tears; and Sisters, pupils, and villagers came to touch her hands and her habit with their rosaries and medals. Father Corbe celebrated the Requiem Mass. He read the *Libera* twice, but he could not sing. The coffin was closed at two o'clock, and the funeral took place an hour later. Mother Theodore was not able to go to the cemetery at Saint Anne's, but on the Sisters' return she assembled them to recall together the virtues of the dear deceased Sister and to urge them to follow in the path she had trod so courageously. "All without exception believe her to be in heaven. All the Sisters have asked for something that belonged to Sister Saint Francis," wrote the Foundress a few days later in the diary, "little nothings, for she was very poor in the goods of this world."

Sister Saint Francis had foretold to the Foundress that she would soon follow her, and in reality that she was able to go through the long days and nights of Sister Saint Francis's illness was a quasi-miracle. For the last four days and nights she hardly left her, as she said herself, and the hemorrhage which followed proved how truly Sister had spoken. Dr. Baty had decided during the past summer that she had an incurable heart ailment which could terminate her life suddenly at any time.⁶³ In reality Mother Theodore lived fourteen weeks longer, including the eight weeks of her final illness. For the first few weeks she did not seem notably worse, and though unable to leave the house in the severe winter weather, she kept at her duties indoors with great diligence. Though she said nothing, these weeks were probably a time of acute suffering and formed part of her preparation for death. She now knew it was never to be hers to erect in their forest the beautiful church in honor of the Immaculate Conception of which she had dreamed. She could only exert herself to the utmost for her Community as long as the Divine Will permitted and trust for the rest to the all-embracing Providence of God, which in all her undertakings had never failed her.

Her five o'clock conference to the Sisters she never omitted, continuing it after almost every other activity had been relinquished; and she continued her correspondence with the Sisters, with those especially whose mental and moral qualities made the spiritual life an uphill struggle. Those who were full of good will and better endowed by nature she left

⁶² Mother Cecilia's MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 72.

⁶³ A Mère Marie, 7 juillet, 1855. S.M.W.A.

to the exclusive guidance of the Holy Spirit. The letters of these last weeks are replete with wise spiritual counsels, which were treasured by the recipients for life. She knew them all intimately, their joys and sorrows, their struggles and faults, and she was offering them now her last recommendations.

Those last admonitions which recur again and again in Mother Theodore's final letters to the Sisters were oftenest counsels of charity, that love of God and the neighbor which is basic in the spiritual life: "Tell your divine Spouse a hundred times a day that you love Him, that you are happy to be His spouse. . . . If you cultivate more and more that disposition of loving Him which He has put into your heart, and if you put your confidence in Mary Immaculate, you will come out of your trials as gold purified in the crucible." "To suffer everything from others, and not make others suffer." "Try never to avoid the company of any of your Sisters, for that would be a source of trouble, temptation, and sin. Love all in God and for God, and all will be well." "We are more pleasing to God when under obedience we are training and teaching the orphans than if, of our own will, we were prostrate all day before the Blessed Sacrament." "The best preparation for Holy Communion is obedience."

A typical English letter⁵⁴ of this last year of her life illustrates her tender, intelligent, and devoted care of her Sisters. It also illustrates her command of English.⁵⁵

I am happy to find myself able to write you a few lines this evening. I am sure you will be glad yourself. I have written to Sr. Anastasie some days ago, so regulate the lessons with her. I hope that you have not too much to do nor anything you cannot do well. I think that all will be settled so and will go well, and you will have a good number of pupils. I have so many fine teachers there, so many devoted Sisters, in fine, the establishment of my heart.

My dear Mary James, all that you teach the children must be taught for the greater glory of God and for the good of the children. The profit that the community draws from it comes only in second line. Believe me, *ma fille*, there will always be money enough in the community of St. Mary's if there are always good religious Sisters. Oh, let us pray always for that, and the rest will be given unto us. But I consider it a good quality in Sisters to have a sensible pleasure when they can contribute to the good of their community. Those who feel nothing, says St. Francis de Sales, are good for nothing.

It is true, my dear child, that Our Lord has very often tried the love of His most remarkable servants by temptations and crosses of every kind before bestowing upon them His choicest favors. They were very faithful to Him even during those days of trial. Continue to be faithful, my dear child, and after that, hope in your beloved and chaste Spouse, Who loves you so much even after your numerous and grievous faults. You may be yet a great saint though you have been a sinner. It is not presumption to have that confidence in Our Lord. It was He Who sent Father Boudreaux and inspired him to say what he said to you. He will give you another when it is necessary. All those things are means, but we have above all

⁵⁴ To Sister Mary James at Evansville, September 30, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁵⁵ When Sister Mary Theodore stated in 1855 that none of the French Sisters spoke English perfectly, she did not except her aunt, and she did point out how poorly Sister Saint Francis Xavier spoke it, a fact which had brought her all her life many humiliations.

Our Lord, Who uses them for our good. May He be praised forever. I have already written too much. Then goodbye, dear. Continue to pray for

YOUR DEVOTED SR. THEODORE.

Father Corbe was now saying daily and even Sunday Mass for the Community in the convent chapel. Sister Saint Francis Xavier had noticed with pain months before her own death that her beloved superior was daily growing weaker and weaker.⁵⁶ This steady decline was even more apparent during February and the first weeks of March. The bitter cold continued unabated, and for several days in mid-February the thermometer in Terre Haute stood at twenty-six below zero, an all-time low in Indiana. A few days later the temperature rose a little, and Mother Theodore looked out of her window one morning to see the trees covered with dazzling white frost. "This gives to our forest an air of purity and innocence very pleasing to the sight. What will heaven be if our poor earth is at times so beautiful!"⁵⁷ Monseigneur came twice for short periods undeterred by the severe cold from his usual journeys on business up and down the diocese. The second visit was to discuss with Mother Theodore the proposed mission in Indianapolis. He had selected a site to build on and offered to interest himself in raising money for the undertaking.

Sometime during these months also the two orphan children of Jacques Roquet, who had died in Evansville in January, 1856, a few weeks later than his young wife Mary Friel Roquet, climbed the steps of the new motherhouse accompanied by one of their aunts, the Misses Grace and Margaret Friel, to see the dark-eyed Sister in the big chair who they were told was Mother Theodore. Little Margaret Roquet⁵⁸ was eight years old, her brother Hugh⁵⁹ two years younger. Saint Mary-of-the-Woods probably never had a more devoted daughter than Margaret Roquet Wheeler, who remembered in her old age this visit to the Foundress then in the last suffering year of her life, and the strawberries she gave them to eat. The children were reared by their devoted aunts in the village, and three generations of the family have been closely associated with Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The Foundress's labors during these last weeks are almost incredible. She sent out the ten circulars to the missions on the death of Sister Saint Francis Xavier, the copies made by different Sisters, and mailed the children's reports also. Anxieties were not wanting, and not till March 2 did she make the important change of removing Sister Mary Cecilia from her post as superior of the academy to assist her and replace Sister Saint Francis Xavier in the novitiate.

She was still subject to the countless interruptions, of which Sister

⁵⁶ *Life of Sister Francis Xavier*, p. 369.

⁵⁷ Community Diary.

⁵⁸ Margaret Roquet Wheeler, '60-'66, mother of Grace Wheeler Mug, '97, Mary Wheeler Hewitt, '04, and Lucile Wheeler, '13. When the new convent church was ready for use in 1891, Mrs. Wheeler's sons, Hugh, John, and James, who spent much time in the village, were among the first acolytes.

⁵⁹ Hugh D. Roquet, 1850-1921, graduated from Saint Louis University in 1876; studied law in Terre Haute under John W. Voorhees and John E. Lamb; practiced there as attorney and county clerk, and was for many years the trusted legal adviser of the Sisters of Providence.

Saint Francis Xavier had written a few months earlier to Sister Eudoxie in France.

I confess that it seemed to me impossible to arrive at holy indifference and be interrupted a hundred times without losing one's equanimity. By dint of practice I have had to learn this lesson, and I think I know it now. Twenty times a day someone enters my room, and I try to recall the gracious expression you had when we came to ask our permissions, and if I cannot be amiable, I try at least to be patient. Mother Theodore is interrupted even more than I, for besides the Sisters, she has also workmen and strangers. The good God has happily given her graces and talents, and she dispatches business in a manner which amazes the Americans, who never attempt to take advantage of her.⁶⁰

During these weeks she was always at Mass, sometimes after a sleepless and suffering night, but when Sister Olympiade demurred, she would reply that without the grace and strength she drew from the Holy Sacrifice she could never bear her sufferings. The record of her correspondence shows letters to almost every Sister on the missions and several to the local superiors. During these six weeks Sister Anastasie, superior at Evansville, received six letters in the Foundress's handwriting; Sister Joachim, superior at the boys' orphan asylum, and Sister Saint Charles, superior at the newly opened mission of Columbus, each five; several other superiors, among them Sister Basilide and Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, each received four; and many other Sisters had two and three. Long letters had to be written to the Le Fer family, to Mme. Parmentier, and other friends who had known and loved Sister Saint Francis Xavier. The communication to the French superiors quoted on pages 773-774, covers five typed pages, and by steamer to Havre could now reach Ruillé in fifteen days.⁶¹

During these weeks of great physical suffering, the Foundress's mind was not entirely free from anxiety, not however for the welfare of the Congregation. It was growing rapidly, solidly established, assured of the entire devotion of its two ecclesiastical superiors, their beloved Father Bishop, as Sisters and pupils loved to call him, and their equally honored Father Corbe. Father DuPontavice's opinion was practically general among the clergy: "Yes, Monseigneur, the Saint Mary's that you founded with the aid of God and in honor of His Holy Mother . . . has been blessed by Jesus and Mary . . . one of the most beautiful solitudes in America. If I judge from what I see and know, the spirit is excellent, and all the Jesuit Fathers who give retreats there say they do not know any Community which equals it in fervor and religious spirit."⁶² Thanks to their Mother's genius for business matters, the Community had a suitable, even a handsome, motherhouse adequate for many years and almost entirely paid for. Bishop de Saint-Palais was accustomed jocosely to remind the Foundress that she must not think of dying till all her debts were paid. He had, however, acknowledged that they were now inconsiderable when he approved her project of erecting a church in honor of the Immaculate Conception. She now knew also that the local sandstone was not a reliable building material, and the Bishop had given permission to add to the academy with better materials. One great solicitude, however, re-

⁶⁰ 19 décembre, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁶¹ Sister Mary Joseph à Mère Marie, 17 mai, 1856. S.M.W.A.

⁶² Du Pontavice Collection, 18 février, 1856.

mained and though with her usual charity and prudence she allowed no trace of it to appear in her ordinary correspondence, she dwells upon it in a letter to Mother Mary as early as July, 1855.⁶³

If I only had, as you say, a person to replace me. But there is none, and I do not know where to find one to train her. All these considerations have thrown me into a deep sadness. . . . You will blame me, no doubt, for not having provided against this contingency sooner. I blame myself; yet it seems to me that I could not do anything about it.

It is simply out of the question to use Sister St. Vincent or Sister Basilide; both are unequal to the work they are doing. Sister Mary Cecilia has many qualifications and is far superior to the other two; still, she has not, in my opinion, what would be necessary to govern the Congregation. There is another who is very promising, whose piety is developing and strengthening, and who appears to me to have the germs of those qualities which, if I mistake not, would make an excellent superior. But she is still only a novice and needs much training herself before having to be occupied with others. Yet I feel that she is making rapid progress. She is a devoted soul, large-minded, always ready to forget herself for others. Moreover, she has natural qualities that give her, imperceptibly, the ascendancy over all around her, no one minding it or she herself appearing to be conscious of it. It is on this dear Sister that I rest my hopes, but they cannot be realized if I die soon. You know, without doubt, who she is; it is Sister Mary Joseph Le Fer. I am confiding this to you, a secret which no one here suspects.

Mother Theodore's opinion of Sister Mary Joseph had been expressed in a letter to France during the previous spring. "Elvire is a very able person who proceeds at full sail in the way of perfection. But she is very delicate."⁶⁴ The Foundress allowed her no illusions about her spiritual capabilities, however. "She told me many times after the death of our sainted Sister Saint Francis, 'Neither you nor anyone else here will love our Lord as Sister Saint Francis loved Him.' " Sister Mary Joseph took this bit of ascetic lore philosophically, "I am well aware," she wrote, "that all hearts have not the same capacity for divine love, but if we love our good Master and Saviour with all the strength He has put in our hearts, He will be satisfied and will help us not to be lacking in this great duty."⁶⁵

Though destined eventually to inherit the spirit and carry on in the Congregation the ideals and last wishes of the Foundress, Sister Mary Joseph had not been professed a year when Mother Theodore died. She was now, however, thirty years of age and had been almost four years in the Community. Through her close association with the Foundress, she had received an admirable training for the future services she was as Mistress of Novices to render to the Community. Father Gleizal had already recommended her to Mother Theodore as fitted by nature and by grace to replace her saintly sister in this important post. Although in her circular after the death of Sister Saint Francis Xavier, the Foundress had asked the Sisters on the missions to recite for nine days the *Veni Creator* and the *Ave Maris Stella*, for the light and grace necessary to make the changes involved, not for a month after Sister Saint Francis Xavier's death, however, as we have seen, a month of earnest prayer and

⁶³ 7 juillet, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁴ A Sœur Marie-Anne, 21 mars, 1855. S.M.W.A.

⁶⁵ A Mère Marie, n.d., 1857. S.M.W.A.

sacrifice, did Mother Theodore make any effort to fill the vacant place. On March 2 she records in a few lines in the diary that on that day "Sister Mary Cecilia, First Assistant, comes to live at the motherhouse to assist me and take charge of the postulants."

Monseigneur de Saint-Palais was at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at the time, and he went away across the bottom in the wagon over the old river road, a morass of mud, as the new causeway then under construction was not to be completed for another eight months. He was offering, to take Père Michel's place, a French gardener named Chopin, who arranged to arrive with his family on March 11. On that day Mother Theodore was too ill to be up. "My God, as Thou willest," she wrote. In a day or so she was able, gathering her last remaining strength, to resume her duties once more, but it was for the last time. The Forty Hours Devotion had not been held at the regular time before Lent as Sister Saint Francis Xavier had just died. Now on Palm Sunday, March 16, it opened with the usual solemnity, the Sisters replacing one another before the beautifully decorated altar. The Terre Haute Sisters came home, and the Community was in retreat. One day only was Mother Theodore able to join them. On this day she probably wrote her last two letters, to Father Benoit and to Monseigneur, which were mailed on the seventeenth. The last Sister to whom she wrote, the final communication of a series of ninety recorded in the diary, was Sister Anastasie.⁶⁶ She had said to her when blessing her on her departure for Evansville in August, 1855, "This is the last time I will bless you."⁶⁷

Next morning during Mass Mother Theodore was taken so ill that she was obliged to leave the chapel. She never returned except in her coffin. She had the diary brought to her during the day and penned her last entry, "I am obliged to keep my bed. What a beautiful week to be upon the cross. O good Cross, I will love thee with all my heart." When Sister Rose came into her room after breakfast to set it to rights, Mother Theodore said to her, "Ma fille, I left Mass. It is my last."⁶⁸ She felt the premonitory symptoms of one of her terrible illnesses with which her reduced strength made her utterly unfitted to cope. She felt and said that it would be her last. Her state was critical and painful from the very first. Sister Olympiade and Father Corbe agreed in finding it exactly similar to the almost mortal illness from which she recovered in a quasi-miraculous manner in 1841, but Mother Theodore was far from having in 1856 the latent resistance which she had shown fifteen years earlier.

Now a general break-up of her constitution was apparent with involvement of lungs, heart, and digestive tract, accompanied by violent pains in the head and burning fever. Sister Mary Joseph had been sleeping in her room to render assistance in case she would be needed at night, but Mother Theodore now forbade her to continue as her presence kept the Foundress, through fear of waking her, from groaning and praying aloud during her long nights of suffering. "She kept her old and

⁶⁶ Printed in *J. and L.*, p. 439.

⁶⁷ Mother Anastasie's Remembrances.

⁶⁸ Mother Cecilia's MS. Life, p. 73.

faithful attendant to whom God gave the strength to live without sleep at night and to work in the day, dear Sister Olympiade."⁶⁹

On Wednesday, March 19, she became very much worse. Dr. Ezra Read was in constant attendance upon her, but the Sisters now wished to send for Dr. Baty, who had known her so long. He came from Vincennes on Friday, March 21, and pronounced the Foundress very ill, but not dangerously so. He had given her only a few hours to live in 1841, and then had seen her unaccountably get better. Now he could not say whether or not she would die, as he had seen her in a worse condition. He bled her, and he felt after this first visit that she would continue very sick for three or four days and would then recover. He acknowledged, however, to Sister Mary Joseph that her state was alarming. This was on Holy Saturday.

On Easter day she suffered greatly, and that day she commissioned Sister Mary Joseph to write to the superiors at Ruillé. She did so at once, fulfilling in advance the promise she had made the Foundress to say after her death to Mother Mary that she died united in mind and heart with her dear Congregation of Ruillé, that she had always loved and respected her good Mothers in France and would never cease to do so. Holy Week had thus passed in the greatest anxiety, and the Paschal Alleluias of 1856 at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were very sad.⁷⁰ On Easter Monday, however, she felt somewhat better. The plan of the chapel which was going up at Ruillé was received from France about this time, and Mother Theodore was deeply interested in looking at it. She found it pretty but rather small and said that if she were to build it, she would make it larger. She discussed it with Father Corbe and inquired his opinion upon a location for it. He thought it should be added as a wing to new Providence extending into the garden, and she replied, "That was exactly my idea, and I intended eventually to balance it on the other side with a similar building for a novitiate."⁷¹

Ill as Mother Theodore was, the Sisters who wished had access to her almost to the end. Sister Gonzague, then a very young Sister, wished to consult her about some small trouble of conscience and saw her only a few days before her death. She said she was told that Mother Theodore was suffering greatly, but she did not perceive it. Prayers were now mounting to heaven all over the Community for their suffering Mother. "Prayer was made without ceasing," wrote Sister Mary Cecilia.⁷² "The Sisters offered entire days of good works, and fasting was joined to prayer. All united in supplication that Mother's life might be spared." The feast of the Patronage of Saint Joseph passed, and the precious health of their Mother was not granted to their prayers. Two or three times she herself cut off some flowers from plants brought from Père Michel's greenhouse and sent Sister Mary Joseph to put them at the feet of their holy Protector. A novena was made to him, the relics of Saint Urban were exposed and a novena made to him also. The Blessed Virgin, Saint Anne, and Sister Saint Francis were besought in turn. "One

⁶⁹ Sister Mary Joseph's MS. notes.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 73.

day," relates Sister Mary Joseph, "Mother called me to say she had made a promise to Our Lady of Hope. 'What a happy thought, Mother,' I said, 'We did not know what Saint to turn to now. . . . We will learn the hymn to Our Lady of Hope.' " ⁷³

For two or three days the beloved patient would rally and show considerable improvement, and the spirits of the Sisters would rise, but a short time later would come the inevitable relapse, leaving her always weaker and more suffering. Sister Mary Joseph was with her almost constantly now, helping her with the Community devotions she was able to perform, reciting with her or for her the *Stabat Mater*, which she loved, and the Penitential Psalms, which she was accustomed to say on days when she did not have the privilege of assisting at Holy Mass and which she used to say alternately with her Sisters on the way to the village church. Her crucifix was continually in her hands or pressed to her lips. The devoted French priests of the diocese now joined the crusade to save her. Father Benoit, Father Chassé, Father DuPontavice, and others often said Mass for her and remembered her daily in their Mementos.

On March 29 Monseigneur arrived accompanied by Dr. Baty, to remain a week. The doctor bled the patient again, a measure which afforded immediate but only temporary relief. He consulted also with Dr. Read, and both skilled practitioners did everything possible to help her. Having seen her recover so often, Dr. Baty could hardly believe she would die, but when he left on Saturday, April 5, saying she was better, she had a very high fever. ⁷⁴

"Has he gone?" asked the Foundress. "Yes," answered Sister Olympiade. "Tant mieux. Tant mieux," ⁷⁵ rejoined the patient. "But why, Mother? He is doing everything possible to relieve you." "Because I am now in the hands of God. Give me my crucifix to kiss. I prefer this remedy to any other." The missions were now being written to almost daily to keep them informed of their Mother's condition, a duty which devolved upon Sister Mary Cecilia.

The beloved patient during the second week of April continued much the same, still very ill and suffering. Sister Olympiade was continually at her bedside. She

. . . was an excellent sick nurse, writes Mother Mary Cecilia. She had a particular talent for it and much experience. She was, moreover, a devoted daughter to Mother and one who would not forget, neglect, or omit anything that should be done. She had taken care of Mother's health for many years, had nursed her, and carried her through the severe sicknesses she had had from time to time. And now at this crisis she was, if possible, more than ever attentive. She watched her day and night. Even when she had to be relieved, she cautiously provided for the time she would be gone so that the proper care would surely be given. Towards the last days she did not leave her at all. ⁷⁶

Thus the weary days dragged on. On the fifteenth she was much better, but on the seventeenth and again on the twenty-fifth, the inevitable relapse followed. Her digestion was so poor that any attempt to find a more

⁷³ Sister Mary Joseph's MS. notes.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ "So much the better."

⁷⁶ MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 73.

nourishing aliment than her customary *bouillie* would bring on a severe attack, which invariably left her noticeably weaker. During one of these crises, Dr. Read was sent for suddenly, and came at once almost from the deathbed of his wife, who had expired only a few hours before.

This has truly been for the American Sisters a year of trials, privations, and sufferings, wrote Sister Mary Theodore to the Superiors in France early in May. Since Holy Week Mother Theodore has been bound to a couch of pain with hardly a moment of relief. We expected to be obliged to announce her death to you as it appeared inevitable. We had almost no hope. On Sunday, April 28, Sister Mary Cecilia told the community that they would soon be without a Mother. It is inconceivable how with her poor health she has been able to endure her cruel sufferings. It is painful to see her. For two or three days she has been better, and hope has come back to our hearts. What a life of crosses we have had this year. . . . The good God loves us dearly; at least He does not spare us.⁷⁷

This letter, written on the fifth, was not sent till the twelfth of May. On the margin are the hurriedly traced words:

Our Mother is dying. The doctor has no more hope. God alone can save her by a miracle. Oh, pray for us.

The hours on earth of the beloved and revered Foundress of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were now numbered. The sands of her life were fast running out. When Dr. Baty saw her last, toward the beginning of the second week of May, he found her so changed, her former symptoms so much increased and others added, that he absolutely pronounced her beyond human aid. She could not recover. She had not asked for the Last Sacraments more than to say now and then to Sister Mary Cecilia, "Do not let me die without the Sacraments." Father Corbe saw the necessity for administering Extreme Unction, and he appointed the hour for the ceremony on May 12.

Mother had prepared herself long since, wrote Sister Mary Cecilia. The sacrifice of her life was made, her act of resignation perfected, and she received the notification with composure and calmly prepared herself for that moment, the most solemn for a Christian. . . . The room was full of weeping Sisters, and an impressive silence prevailed, rendering more audible the words of the sad ceremony. No one dared to disturb the sacred solemnity by . . . outward demonstrations of grief, and strange to say, we still clung to the hope that, as it had happened before, she might yet recover.⁷⁸

Each day, each hour now might be her last, and the Sisters who had loved her in life were to love her and prove it by their devotion till the very end. On the two remaining nights, the twelfth and thirteenth, some remained in and about the sick room all night. Others retired half dressed to be able to come at once if their Mother grew worse. All day on the thirteenth they hovered about the room, and as the night drew on more and more Sisters came in, and the room gradually filled up. The academy Sisters having seen their pupils in bed, left a few in charge and hurried across the bridge in silence through the darkness to join in the prayers in the candle-lit room where their Mother lay dying. Sister Mary Cecilia sat at the head of the bed. Sister Mary Ambrose was kneeling at its foot.

At midnight it was evident that her last moments were approaching.

⁷⁷ A Mère Marie, 5 mai, 1856. S.M.W.A.

⁷⁸ MS. Life of Mother Theodore, p. 74.

Father Corbe was sent for, and the remaining Sisters gathered about the dying couch of Mother Theodore. Absorbed in God, she lay quietly while Father Corbe gave the last absolution and recited the prayers for the agonizing again and again. Her breathing grew slower and slower and finally came the last sigh. Father Corbe tells of the bright ray of heavenly beauty, which illumined her countenance at the last. God has, however, strange ways of trying His elect. Devoted Sisters were doing everything to help the dying Foundress and ease the violent pain in her head. Someone prepared a counter-irritant, an ordinary remedy of the time when aspirin was unknown, a mustard plaster placed at the back of the neck. Just then she began to grow much worse, and the watchers round her bed could see her raise her hand once or twice to her head as though in pain. Then in the grief and excitement, the plaster was forgotten until after her death the heartbroken Sisters found it where it had been placed hours before and where it had added appreciably to the death agony of their beloved Mother.

She was buried next day. The Bishop arrived, accompanied by Father Michael Clarke from Lafayette. Father Chassé sang the High Mass of Requiem as the Foundress had requested of him, knowing that Father Corbe would be unable to do it. Father Audran sang in the choir, and the Bishop officiated at the funeral in black cope and white mitre and delivered a beautiful eulogy of the deceased filled with consoling words for her sorrowing daughters. The Sisters themselves bore their Mother's remains to the cemetery on the knoll of Saint Anne, where they were privileged to look once more upon the calm countenance of their incomparable Mother before she was laid by the side of Sister Saint Francis Xavier. On the white cross above her head was placed the inscription, "Ego dormio sed cor meum vigilat super hanc domum quam edificavi."⁷⁹ Her age was fifty-seven years, seven months, and twelve days, and she had been in Indiana fifteen years and a half.

Letters of condolence and respect poured in to the Community. We will quote only one written a few weeks after the death of the Foundress of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods by one who knew her and esteemed her perhaps more than anyone else, Father Corbe:

Mother Theodore and Sister Saint Francis both loved God with all the strength of their ardent souls; they served Him with the most perfect devotedness, and both terminated their careers of virtue and good works in the most cruel suffering, but they loved and desired these sufferings, and their happiness, as they said themselves, was to be on the cross with their Beloved. . . . If God has sent them almost the same sufferings, He has also bestowed upon them the same favors. He has given them a foretaste of the joys of heaven by visions and extraordinary consolations.

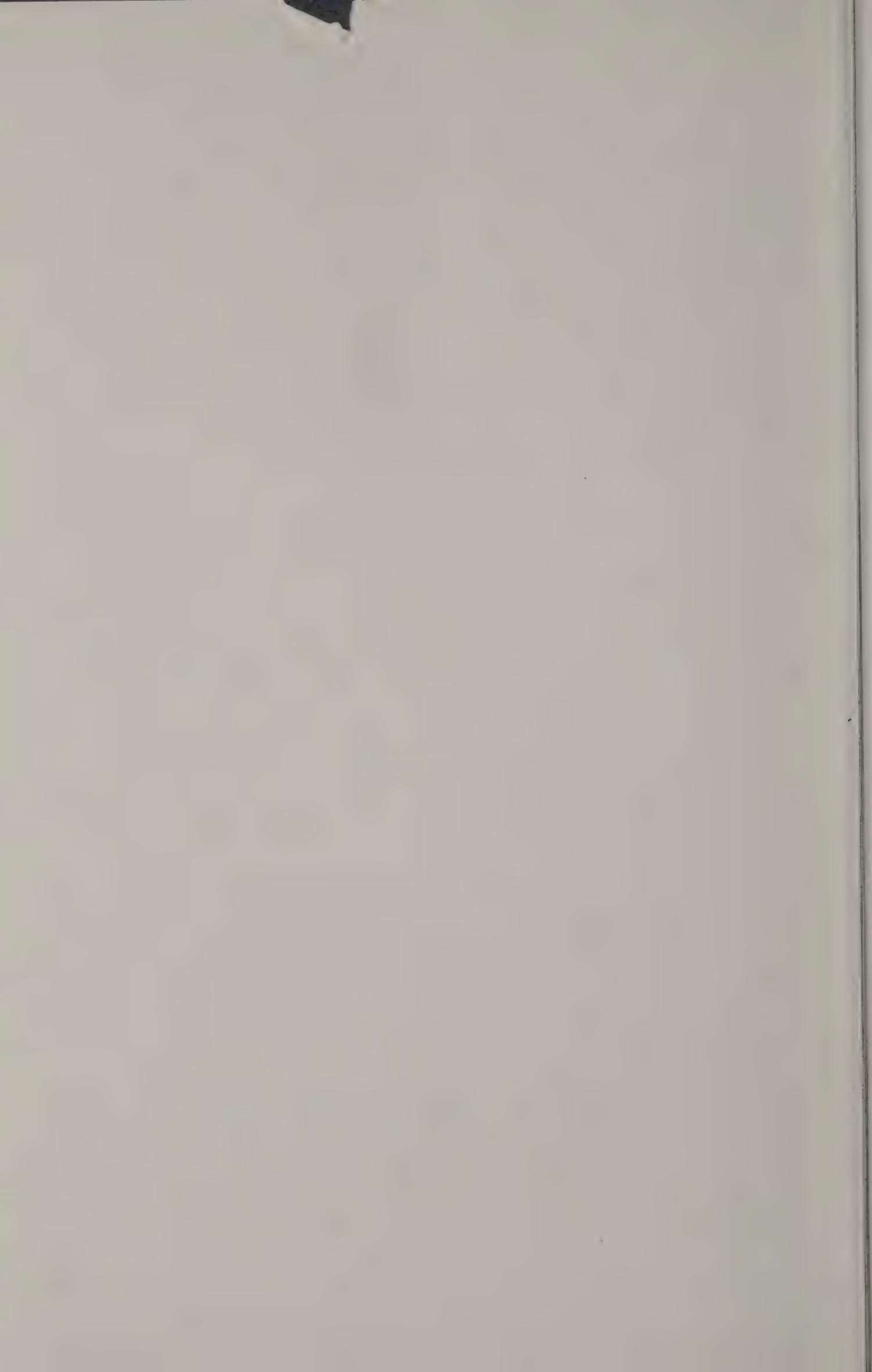
Both have already given indubitable marks of their power with God. . . . I hope that these proofs will multiply and that God will glorify before men those who have sacrificed everything for Him with so much generosity.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ I sleep, but my heart watches over this house which I have founded. An alternate inscription had been considered, "Ici reposent les entrailles de charité." Here lies a heart of charity.

⁸⁰ A Mme. Le Fer de la Motte, 11 juin, 1856. S.M.W.A.

In Mother Theodore's case, this desire was to a degree realized with the introduction of her cause of beatification in 1907. During her life several different Sisters had seen a heavenly light in her room and in her office on the first floor of Providence, and even before her death very remarkable cures and other favors were granted to her prayers. The escape from shipwreck on the winter Atlantic in 1843 has been considered quasi-miraculous. In the years since her death these favors have multiplied. May God in His own good time raise her to the altar. Once during a period of unusual stress during "les années de nos épreuves," Mother Theodore had spent the night in prayer and next day at Holy Communion Father Corbe noticed the aura of peace and joy on her countenance. Later in the day he questioned her as to its cause, and her answer in the words of the *Imitation of Christ* may well serve to close this story of her life-work in the Congregation of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods,

"In the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness."



APPENDIX I

SAINTE MARIE, ILLINOIS

SAINTE MARIE, Illinois, was founded by a group of Catholic pioneers, who planted the Old Faith and the old devotion to our Lady in a favored spot of the New World.

Over one hundred years ago, on the feast of Saint James, July 25, 1835, Joseph Picquet, then a lad of nineteen, accompanied by his tutor, a young Jesuit, the Reverend Michael Guth, embarked on a French frigate for the long and dangerous voyage to America. Notwithstanding his youth, he came on an important and responsible mission. The eldest of a large family of children, he had been chosen by his father and uncles to find a home in the New World, to which the entire family connection proposed to emigrate. It seems strange that a school boy in his teens should have been entrusted with such a responsibility, but his elders, fathers of families, could ill be spared from their homes for so long a time, and they knew they could depend on the loyalty, wisdom, and good sense of their young agent.

In those early days of the nineteenth century the Picquet family were living in Alsace, then a French province, where their fathers had lived before them. They were persons of some consequence in their native town of Haguenau, where they kept up a sort of patriarchal state, surrounded by old family retainers, and headed by M. Jacques Picquet, father of young Joseph. Those were sad days for the Church of France, still suffering from the effects of the French Revolution and the attacks of infidel philosophers. The Picquets, ardent Catholics, found themselves greatly attracted to the group of brilliant young men, among them Lacordaire and the Count de Montalembert, who were then gathered about the Abbé de Lamennais, preparing to defend the Church from her enemies by tongue and pen. Some of the meetings of this group took place in the house of Joseph Picquet, brother of Jacques, at Strasbourg. The younger Joseph, namesake of his uncle, while yet a lad, was permitted to attend some of these meetings, and in later life loved to describe these eminent men to his American descendants.

The unfortunate Lamennais, in spite of his regrettable end, rendered great service to the Church in France, and in particular, his ardent espousal of the cause of popular liberty may be said to have paved the way for those great papal encyclicals on social justice, which are now so universally acclaimed. The apostasy of their leader was a great blow to the Catholic Liberals, and the Picquets, despairing of the triumph of Christian democracy in Europe, began to consider seriously the possibility of emigrating in order to establish elsewhere a new social order based on the principles of the Gospel.

About this time someone presented Mademoiselle Louise Picquet, who later, but within the lifetime of its foundress, entered the Society of the Sacred Heart, with the works of James Fenimore Cooper. These, passing from hand to hand in the family, turned the minds of all to America as a possible site for their Utopia, and it was finally determined to send young

Joseph to "spy out the land," and report on the feasibility of the project. He was to select a region where they could get sufficient land to establish large estates, enjoy the pleasures of the chase, and, above all, practice the Catholic religion unmolested.

To an inexperienced boy the undertaking must have bristled with difficulties—the long, comfortless voyage, the alien land, and the strange customs, the foreign tongue. But Joseph was not easily daunted. He bought a horse in Pittsburgh and rode to Chicago, which he liked not at all. It was a "mudhole," he said. St. Louis he liked, it had a French flavor, but he had his orders, "Keep away from cities," so he went east into Illinois, within forty miles of the Indiana line, where, in Jasper County, he found a suitable territory. It was virgin soil, untilled, uncleared, inhabited only by wild beasts and roving bands of Indians, but the rich prairie loam, watered by the Embarras River, promised abundant harvests, while the proximity of Vincennes, long the stronghold of French colonists, would assure the settlers of sympathetic neighbors, and, what was more important, of priests to minister to their spiritual needs.

After spending a year in these investigations, young Picquet went back to France, where a full family council passed on the matter, French fashion, and in 1837 he returned with authority to buy. He had now attained his majority, and could dispense with a tutor, but this time he was accompanied by ten young men of his own age, relatives by blood or marriage.

Traveling west by coach and later by horseback, the little company made their way to Vincennes, where they presented themselves to the Bishop. The eastern part of Illinois, where they proposed to settle, belonged at that time to the vast diocese of Vincennes, then presided over by its first bishop—Bishop Bruté. As a child the Bishop had witnessed the execution of priests and nobles in the French Revolution, and had been privileged to carry the Blessed Sacrament in his bosom to the victims of the Terror, having won the good will of their jailers. He had also been a friend of de Lamennais, and had made many fruitless efforts to win this rebellious soul to repentance and submission to the Church. He was in full sympathy with the social, political, and religious aims of the colonists, and gave them a hearty welcome. Accompanied by the Bishop, Joseph made his way to a town bearing the auspicious name of Palestine, where, on October 12, 1837, they together entered at the land office, 10,700 acres of land under the name "Colonie des Frères."

Long ago, in family conclave, it had been agreed that the settlement should be dedicated to Our Lady, and named for her *Sainte Marie*. The day set for the selection of the village site and its dedication was October 29. On that day the young colonists donned gala attire, and, with guns in hand, rode out to their new property. They came at length to a knoll overlooking the Embarras. The banks were shaded by a profusion of native trees, now gloriously colored with the tints of autumn. Far away stretched the smiling prairie, the future home of themselves and their children.

"Let it be here," said the leader, and his companions silently bowed assent. Dismounting, they knelt on the prairie sod, centuries old, and consecrated their lives and their new home to Her whose loyal knights

they were. They then sang the *Salve Regina*, and ended the little ceremony by discharging their pieces in salute.

It was, of course, impossible to transport the whole clan on one vessel. Eleven times the indefatigable Joseph crossed the seas to bring over detachment after detachment, and when at length the entire family, their connections by marriage, their children, retainers, and peasant tenants were assembled, they numbered several hundreds, and the 10,700 acres was only the beginning of what the Picquets acquired in Jasper County.

During the first years of the little settlement priests from Vincennes visited Ste. Marie from time to time. The first Mass was said on a rustic altar erected in front of a log cabin. The crucifix, candlesticks, and vestments used on this occasion had been brought from France, and are still in use at Ste. Marie. When the Bishop visited the colony, it was desired to receive him with suitable ceremony, but since there were no bells, organs, nor choir his Lordship was greeted with a salvo from the colonists' guns.

Such conditions were but temporary. A community church and school were soon erected, the latter attracting students from a wide territory, and Ste. Marie soon became a center of culture in the wilderness. The church was blessed by the first priest to be ordained in the United States, the Reverend Father Badin, who had been ordained by Archbishop Carroll of Baltimore.

Mindful of the traditions of their fathers, the colonists took pains to preserve the old pious customs. The passing bell rang out its appeal for prayers for the departing soul; on Corpus Christi the procession moved through the flower-decked lanes of the village, and on Rogation Days the whole community circled about the newly-seeded fields to the solemn chant of the Litanies, in which God's blessing was sought on the harvest. On the last days of Holy Week when, as the children were told, the bells "had flown away to Rome," small boys would appear at village doors to sound the clappers for the Angelus, receiving in return baskets of Easter eggs.

Joseph Picquet, honored and revered by all as the founder of the colony, lived to celebrate the diamond jubilee of Sainte Marie in 1912.¹

¹ "Looking Backward," in *Mary's Message*, vol. 5, no. 8, October, 1935, pp. 2-4. Published monthly by the Sisters of Our Lady of Christian Doctrine, New York.

APPENDIX II

THE JOSEPH THRALLS HOUSEHOLD

JOSEPH THRALLS and Sarah Mattingly, daughter of Joseph Mattingly, were married October 14, 1815, in Nelson County, Kentucky, where their home was located at Elizabethtown, twenty-five miles southwest of Bardstown. The family tradition fixes the time of their arrival at the site of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as 1832, when the log cabin later used as a chapel, was probably built. That they earlier formed part of the Kentucky colony in Edgar County, Illinois, is proved by the fact that Isaac Thralls, who died in 1918 and who testified in the process of Mother Theodore's cause, was born there in 1824. Two of his children are still living in the vicinity of Saint Mary's: Mrs. Catherine Thralls Brown and Albert M. Thralls. The Thralls children who were living in 1840 when the Sisters arrived were: Ellen, Mrs. Kennedy; Eliza Ann, married June 13, 1838, to John Donegan; Mary Jane, married February 11, 1840, to Hilary Alvey; Renus,⁵³ married January 5, 1839 to Catherine Gough; Nancy; Isaac, born 1824, married 1847 to Anne Cambron; Mary Lucinda, born 1832, married February 15, 1850 to John Edgerton, later to Solomon Monroe; Charles Jacob, married 1850 to Susan Cambron; Francis, married September 13, 1857, to Margaret Cambron; Joseph; Richard, killed in the Civil War; Augustine Celestine, born November 28, 1839, married September 23, 1862, to Mary Emily Kopick, later to Mary Ann Scott. Isaac Thralls, the sixth child, sixteen years old in 1840, and the other unmarried children were supposedly living at home, all boys except Nancy and the eight-year-old Lucinda. The youngest, Augustine, who was still living when Mother Theodore's process was being carried on, was not a year old in October, 1840.⁵⁴

Francis and Jacob Thralls purchased parts of the forest land about Saint Mary-of-the-Woods adjacent to Joseph Thralls's property. Francis Thralls's first acquisitions were from George Smith in 1835 and originally included the entire site of Saint Mary's village from the present "Sisters' Property" to the church and cemetery sites. His granddaughter, Miss Eugenia Doyle, till 1946 occupied part of her grandfather's original holdings, representing the only one of the pioneer families which had never for a hundred years been beyond the sound of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods convent bells.

⁵³ Irenus or Irenaeus, a favorite name among the French people.

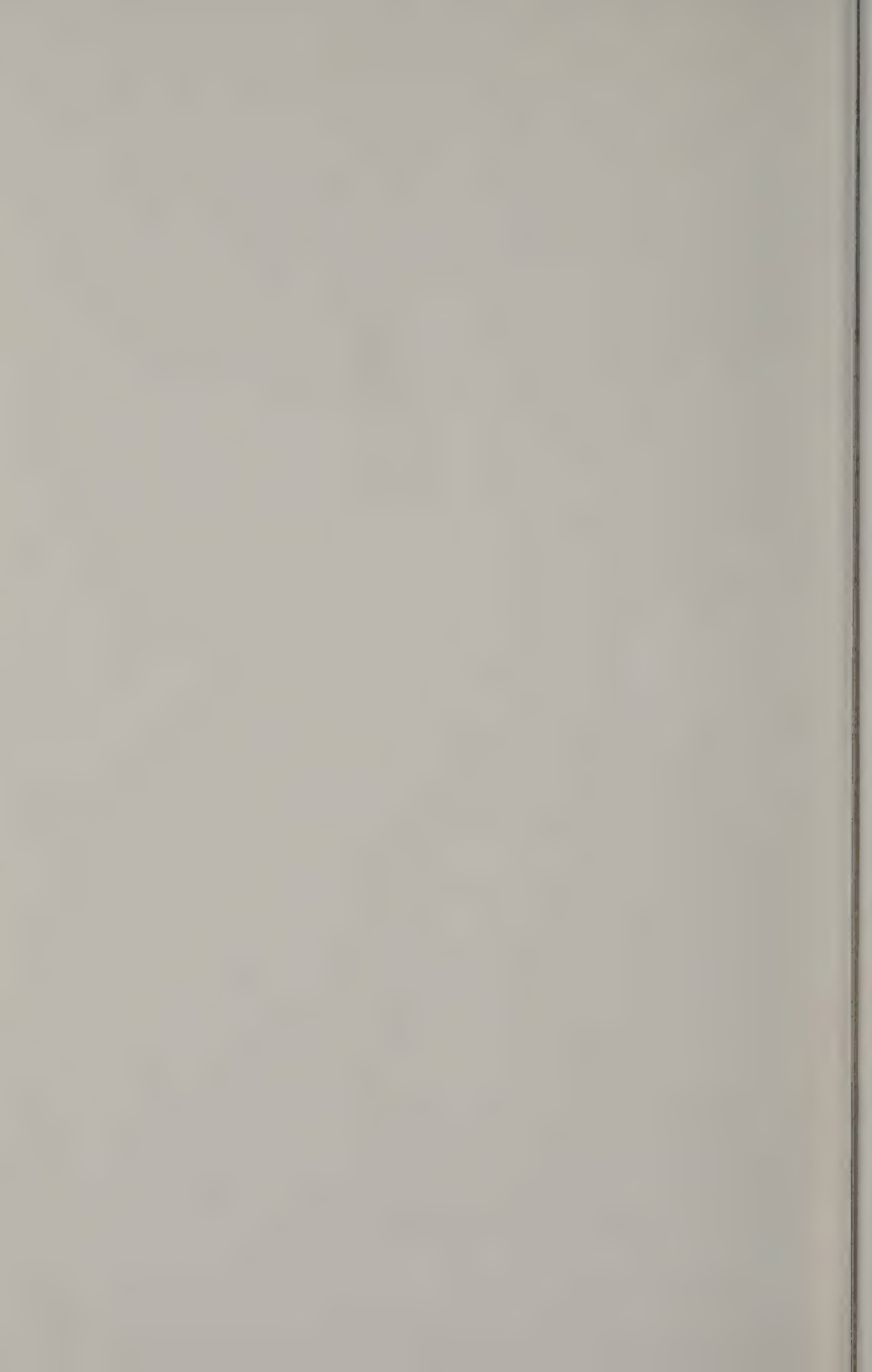
⁵⁴ List obtained from Augustine Thralls in 1912 in Kansas City.

APPENDIX III

MOTHER THEODORE GUERIN

MOTHER was above middle height, and was sturdily built. Her walk was light though her step was firm; there was something manly in her bearing which showed her character of intrepid and persevering courage. Her eyes were dark brown; she had the fair complexion which harmonizes with the dark brown eye. She had, usually, much color, but this flush of the cheek that gave a look of health came from the fever habitual with her poor health. Her features were good, but what was most pleasing in her face was its expression; it was a union of intelligence, goodness, and amiability, enlivened by a gay and lively look. Her countenance was always agreeable; it could be animated and express vividly the fine sentiments of her heart and mind, but its serenity was never disturbed by visible emotions of irritability or clouded by changes of humor. Those who approached her always found her looks pleasant and composed.¹

¹ Mother Cecilia's MS. Life of Mother Theodore.



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SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS ARCHIVES

Letters of Mother Theodore Guérin to Mgr. J. B. Bouvier, Mgr. C. de la Hailandière and others, and to different members of her Community. Over half of the extant originals of the Foundress, one hundred and sixty-one in number, including the three Journals of Travel, were edited and published by Sister Mary Theodosia Mug in *Journals and Letters of Mother Theodore Guérin* in 1936.

In 1937 a collection consisting of some hundreds of autograph letters addressed to the French superiors were received through the courtesy of Reverend Mother Marie-Armelle, Superior General of the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir. This collection which includes ninety-two letters from the Foundress, fifty-two from Sister Saint Francis Xavier, and a lesser number from Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, Sister Basilide, Sister Mary Joseph Le Fer, Sister Mary Eudoxie, and Sister Mary Theodore, has been drawn upon largely in the preparation of the present volume.

The archives also include the following source material:

Two original Dujarié letters and 6 from Mother du Roscoät.	Sister Basilide, 57.
Letters from various French superiors at Ruillé, 68.	Sister Saint Liguori, 29.
From Mother Mary, 22.	Sister Marie Joseph Pardeillan, 20.
Mother Mary Cecilia, 128.	Sister Mary Joseph LeFer, 246.
Sister Saint Francis Xavier, 98.	Sister Mary Eudoxie, 32.
Sister Saint Vincent Ferrer, 25.	Sister Mary Theodore, 33.
	Sister Saint Urban, 4.

Many letters from Mother Theodore's correspondents, among them the following prelates:

J. B. Bouvier, 22.	C. de Forbin-Janson, 3.
C. de la Hailandière, 143.	Samuel Eccleston, 2.
Maurice de Saint-Palais, 24.	A. Blanc, 2.
A. Martin, 23.	M. Marty, O.S.B., 2.
J. G. de Lesquen, 11.	C. Fillion, 1.
J. S. Bazin, 9.	Jacques Nanquette, 1.
N. J. Perché, 8.	James O'Connor, 1.
L. Sebaux, 6.	

American clergy:

J. Corbe, 45.	S. Lalumiere, 3.	} 1 each
J. Benoit, 106.	J. Rudolph, 3.	
E. Sorin, C.S.C., 24.	E. Audran, 3.	
S. Buteux, 24.	M. E. Shawe, 2.	
J. Kundek, 17.	J. Contin, 2.	
J. B. Chassé, 15.	J. P. Bellier, 2.	
J. Delaune, 14.	Bro. Vincent, C.S.C., 2.	
H. DuPontavice, 13.	E. Varela	
A. Deydier, 13.	A. Munschina	
Michael Clarke, 11.	A. Parret	
E. Faller, 10.	Chas. I. White	
J. Guéguen, 5.	S. A. Bernier	
Wm. S. Chartier, 4.	J. and P. McDermott	
L. Ducoudray, 3.		

The Woodstock Jesuits, B. Sestini, J. E. Keller, and C. H. Jenkins on the propagation of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the establishment of the *Messenger*, 46; also J. L. Gleizal, 29; and I. Boudreaux, F. X. Weninger, and A. Van Hulst, 1 each.

Clergé français :

J. Collet, 9.	Botrel	} 1 each
Azaïs, 6.	F. Brillouet	
Lottin, 5.	M. Bruneau	
M. J. Hatton, 5.	Desgenettes	
G. Hardy, 2.	Le Pailleur	
V. Pelletier, 2.	Sevin	

Letters from friends and business firms include :

la famille Parmentier, 24.	Sarah Bolton and her daughter	} 1 each
M. Martin du Nord, 11.	George P. Buell	
Samuel Byerley and Mrs. Byerley, 10.	M. A. Frenaye	
J. F. Meline, 9.	Mrs. Januarius A. McGahan	
M. Perrault de la Bertaudière, 5.	Joseph Picquet	
Sœurs d'Aussac, 5.	Mrs. M. A. Sadlier	
Firmin Nippert, 4.	Mother Catherine Spalding	
Caroline C. Owen, 4.	Louis Veuillot	
John B. Duret, 4.		
Léon Aubineau, 3.		
Samuel Crawford, 3.		
Comte de Chambord, 1.		
Henri de Courcy, 1.		

Martin Collection :

J. B. Corbe, 47.	R. Weinzoepflen, 6.	} 1 each
Mgr. de la Hailandière, 46.	J. Guéguen, 3.	
Sister Saint Francis Xavier, 38.	A. Bessonies, 3.	
J. Benoit, 33.	E. Audran, 2.	
H. DuPontavice, 21.	D. Bach	
E. Sorin, C.S.C., 20.	S. T. Badin	
Wm. Doyle, 14.	S. A. Bernier	
Philip Doyle, 11.	A. Carius	
J. Hamion, 10.	D. Molony	
J. Kundek, 7.	A. Parret	
J. Devine, 4.	Dr. J. I. Baty	} 1 each
Thos. Monaghan, 3.	M. A. Frenaye	
Wm. Murphy, 3.	J. Lasselle	
Edward Doran, 2.		

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Wm. E. F. Griffin, Austin, Minn., and Mr. Magnus Brown, Lakeville, Minn.

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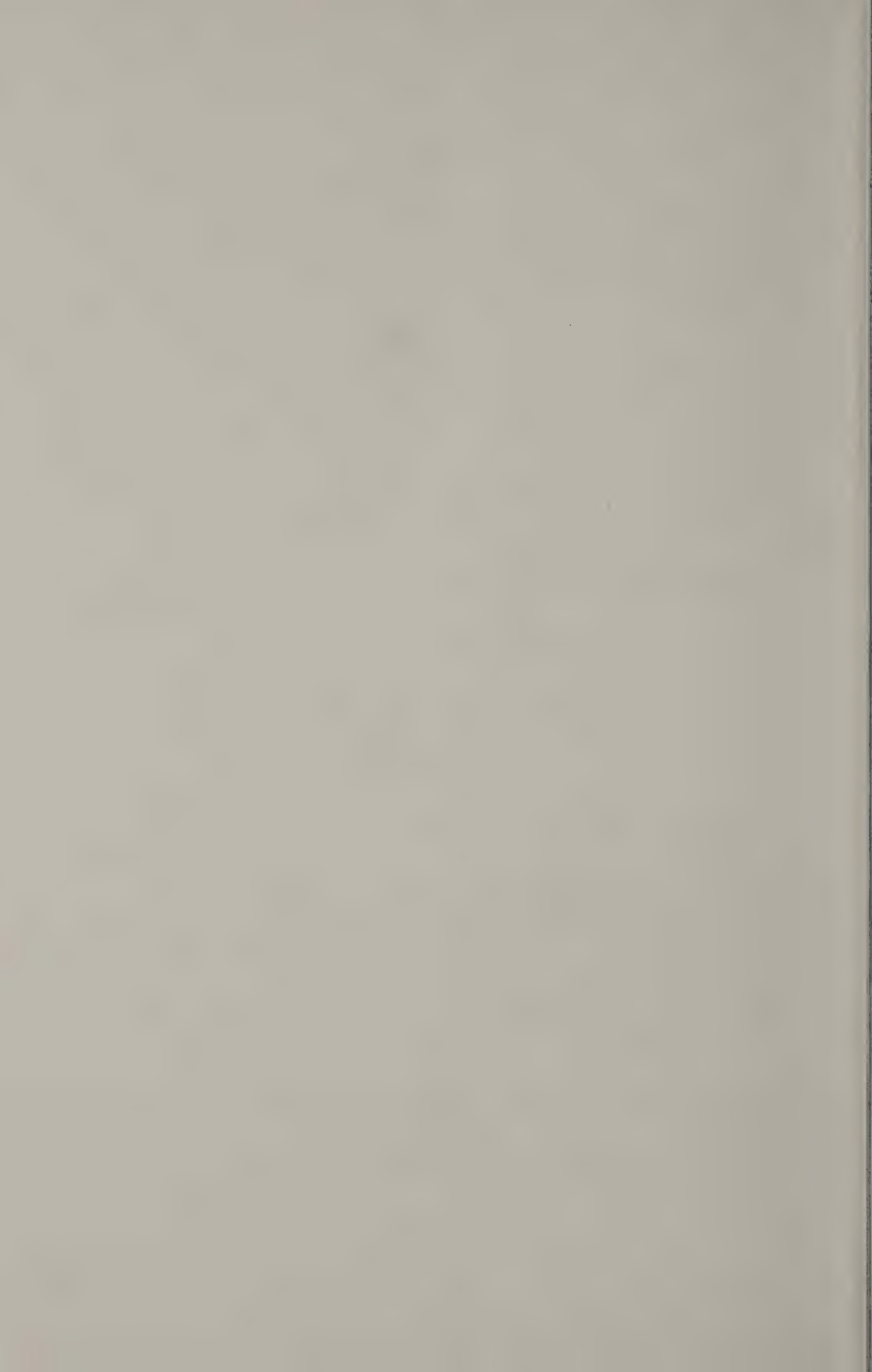
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